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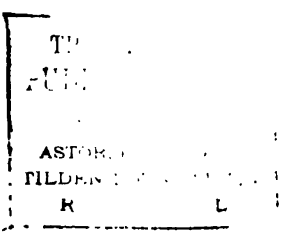
SEYMOUR CHARLTON

W. B. MAXWELL

1. Fiction, English

Maxwell

SEYMOUR CHARLTON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"'Let me go, please. Don't be unkind to me, Seymour!'"

[Page 63.]

SEYMOUR CHARLTON

A NOVEL

By W. B. MAXWELL

AUTHOR OF "VIVIEN," "THE GUARDED FLAME," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK
1909

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"The most of men are like to ships with sails full borne, and no hands to trim or shorten. For a time they ride the seas; but their voyage paper is writ by Chance and blotted with Oblivion. Happy the ship that so cometh to any port."

Bishop Marling (*17th Century*).

SEYMOUR CHARLTON

I

ON a May evening, sixty or seventy men had gathered together for dinner in a London picture gallery. It was the inauguration of a new dining club. The club had been founded for the purpose of meeting at dinner from time to time, and for the entertaining at dinner of distinguished visitors when opportunity offered. Speech-making had now begun, and all the speakers dwelt upon this truly British dinner-idea as though there lay hidden in it something of novelty and grace.

There was a table across the top of the room, and from each end of it stretched a long side table. At the bottom of the room, near the wide entrance, an estrade and a piano had been introduced. On the walls hung the usual sort of pictures: fantastic things rejected by the Royal Academy, wild impressions of land and sea, many portraits staring out of dark backgrounds, two or three large studies of the nude—one, the largest, of a woman who has just stripped herself in an artist's studio. The hired waiters had ranged the empty champagne bottles in rows by the skirting boards, had distributed newly opened bottles along the tables, had brought the coffee, and liqueurs in queerly shaped flasks. As the chairman said, addressing the company with heavily genial tones, there was cause for satisfaction in the success of this first meeting of their club. Members and guests applauded each time that a speech came to an end; and then immediately began talking as if they still had much of interest to discuss. The voices, mingling, made a confused and stupid roar. If one sat silent and listened, the noise appeared extraordinary.

In spite of its large size, the room was oppressively hot; high over head the glass roof was obscured by clouds of tobacco smoke; the electric light shone down as through a fog; there were warm odors of cooked food.—It would be dreadful to enter from the pure air outside.

Now the chairman is speaking again. Not a speech this time; he has merely to announce that a young lady will sing to the assembled diners.

A fat and grey accompanist has come in with a girl, and led her to the estrade. The men turn on their chairs to hear the singing girl. Nearly all are perspiring slightly, and the electric light shows upon greasy noses and bald heads. Old men, as suddenly the faces turn, look haggard, worn-out, half-dead; middle-aged men look pallid, unhealthy, overwhelmed with fatigue; even the young men look weary, feeble, stupefied. All are smoking. Some puff at big cigars dreamily, thoughtfully, while the girl sings in her clear contralto; some have fish-like eyes and lower jaw dropping, as they sit in easy attitudes with a hand hanging loosely upon the back of a neighbor's chair; some, elated, whisper loudly. No one is drunk, but nearly all of them are affected by alcohol.

And the song is sweetly pretty, and the girl seems clean and kind. It is a princess, who for amusement is singing to a herd of swine. It is a girl, forced by need of bread to offer her charms to the bread-holding men. It is a blameless prostitution, as of one who strips herself naked to be painted by men. Timidly, yet frankly, she offers her youth, her grace, her fresh, kind voice for the pleasure of these replete men.

As they sit thus—so ugly to view in their clumsy lolling pose,—who can say the thoughts behind the stupid masks? The food has warmed them, the wine confused them; the music stirs their pulses, sends perhaps a gentle fire flowing through their extended veins. And, most wonderful yet true, there rise here and there splendid, if broken thoughts: noble aspirations, lofty aims, repentant vows—to be great, to be strong, to be chivalrous; to be brave in facing danger, to be tender in sheltering weakness; to turn from sensual joys and seek spiritual happiness.

Thought is so rapid.

The song is ended: all the thoughts are gone. The men beat upon the board with podgy palms or bony fingers, and drink again. The princess has left the swine alone with their troughs. The dull sound of the mingled voices swells into volume once more. It is as if the girl had brought the souls of the men with her, to fill the ugly bodies and keep them quiet while she sang—and now she has taken their souls away with her.

This was what Seymour Charlton was thinking. He was a tall dark man of thirty-five, who sat near the bottom of one of the side tables; and to him the singing voice had seemed to convey a curiously insistent message—a message not easy to understand, yet impossible to evade,—a message for him only: something on which he must continue to brood until he could pierce all its meaning. As he roused himself and looked round the room, his thoughts lost all concentration, became vague and blurred, like impressions too hastily recorded: as when moving fast in a railway train, one sees something, and forgets it because a new image has presented itself. Thus, in flashes, he could see the ugliness of this crowded room, the bestial idiocy of men who sit within closed walls and gorge on May nights, the mental sloth and the total inability to guide themselves to definite goals that alone can make such gatherings possible; again, he could see beyond the room, in flashes widening to the ends of the earth, the aimlessness of life, its monstrous futilities, its ever-increasing sadness.—That was the message, if anything:—the futileness of life and its sadness. How can one escape either?

His host was talking to him. He smiled and answered. The singing spell had faded; he could see the room and the men as they had been a few minutes ago. No ugliness, nothing unusual: just a pleasant, good-natured lot of fellows.

"The Duke speaks well, doesn't he?" said young Mr. Malcomson.

The chairman was a duke of secondary importance—a countrified sporting nobleman of small account in the gilded chamber, but fond of all prominent positions outside it.

"It *is* a jolly evening, isn't it?" said Mr. Malcomson contentedly. "So glad *you* could come, Charlton."

Tom Malcomson was a city man, and Seymour Charlton was the son of a peer—younger son of old Lord Brentwood. Good-natured, beaming Mr. Malcomson was not perhaps ill-pleased to show "a blood" among his guests.

From the snobbish point of view, the guests were patently superior to the hosts. The club members seemed all drawn from the working realms of commerce and finance, but many of the guests were of the idle ornamental class. One could detect on all sides the effort of the new club to lift itself by hanging upon the swallow tails of those who stood on a higher social plane. In splendor of white waistcoats, rigidity of shirt fronts, and exotic character of the flowers in their buttonholes, the hosts could not be surpassed; but in the carriage of their heads, the tones of their voices, and the careless acceptance of their good dinner, the guests excelled. Seymour, looking round, saw several men he knew—men from White's and the Guards' club, and the Foreign Office, younger sons like himself,—all well-brushed idle dogs, more or less masterless, who will follow any whistle, and make themselves agreeable with strangers. They are well-bred, nice dogs always. Next time you whistle, they may not come; but they will never bite the hand that has fed them.

Near to Seymour Charlton a youth of this type was thoroughly enjoying himself. He talked to everyone with schoolboy familiarity, and endeavored at all hazards to pull people's legs. Without being exactly a wag, he had acquired fame as the best of good companions. He was now asking impertinent questions of the red-faced man opposite.

"Why did you come back from Mexico and South America if you liked it so much?"

"I had done my work. I came home to rest."

"How could you tear yourself away from the Spanish ladies?"

The red-faced man had been talking of the voluptuous pasha-like existence of wealthy residents in the wicked South American cities.

"Tout passe, tout lasse. I'm not as young as I used to be. All I want now is a good dinner, a good cigar, and——"

"Don't you believe him," said another man. "Sir Gregory is a terrible chap. And haven't we got pretty ladies in London? You wait till you see the ladies at my supper to-night," and he laughed with self-satisfaction.

The red-faced man was Sir Gregory Stuart. He was squat, solid, heavy, with coarse sandy hair and moustache; his strong forehead and rather tired eyes gave one an impression of power and cleverness; all else about him suggested dense commonness and grossness. But his history seemed to show that he must be astonishingly clever. He had been a sort of underling in the Great Hayes-Gaskel group of Anglo-American speculators; and when, eight or nine years ago, this famous combination came to irretrievable ruin, all supposed that Stuart had collapsed with his superior officers. Yet now he was back again in London; had made or re-made his fortune, bought a big house at Knightsbridge, and been given the K.C.M.G. in recognition of mysterious services rendered to the British Government during a time of earthquake or revolution.

The man who spoke of his impending supper party was Teddy Wace, a rich stockbroker. He was small, fat, black, with jewelled rings on his stubby little fingers, and black hair on the back of his hands. He was one of those drab-colored, heavily sculptured little men who seem to be fashioned out of gutta-percha, who have deep thick voices and full chuckling laughs, who are nearly always opulent and who are often popular. Teddy was immensely popular in theatrical and musical circles, and was sometimes welcomed even in polite society.

Below Sir Gregory sat a fashionable doctor, and below him were more city men—friends of Malcomson,—who were chattering of chorus-girls and low comedians. Lower down there was a writer of books or plays—a shy, nervous, bulbous-headed creature, who, all through dinner, had looked here and there with observant questioning eyes—possibly making mental notes for a novel or a drama.

"How long are we supposed to sit here?" asked somebody. "Why don't the Duke make a move?"

The glass roof was completely hidden by tobacco smoke; there were more and more speeches; each speaker promised to be brief; each speaker broke his promise. They were still dwelling on the happy idea of these club dinners. The idea was so good that you could not touch upon it lightly and swiftly.

"Oh, I say—there's that beast Collingbourne going to speak."

"Hush," said the fashionable doctor reprovingly; and he glanced at Seymour Charlton.

The bald-headed, bearded man who had risen on the other side of the room was Seymour's half-brother, Lord Collingbourne. He was an utterly impossible person,—a pariah and an outcast. People carefully avoided meeting him, hated him as a radical, socialist, and mob-orator whose public harangues sowed discontent and disloyalty among the untutored masses. No one had asked Lord Collingbourne to speak here. He had got upon his feet uninvited: he was a spouter, and must spout in season and out of season.

"As the roseate moments fly," said Lord Collingbourne, in a loud rasping voice, "I will not detain you long——"

He was tall and thin,—nearly twenty years older than his brother. His bald forehead was high and shining, his nose large and bird-like; his short scrubby beard showed the hard straight line of his lips; and the corners of the mouth puckered into the querulous smile of the naturally bad-tempered man who for the occasion is attempting to be pleasant and facetious. He had strong bushy eyebrows, and his deep-set eyes glittered behind gold-rimmed spectacles.

To the company forced unwillingly to listen, everything about the man was repellent and disgusting—his unsavory reputation; his harsh-toned voice; his goggles; his shabby old-fashioned dress-suit, his boot-lace of a tie, his turned down collar. The ducal chairman shuffled uneasily in his seat, and veered away from the speaker as though he really could not look at him with patience.

"I never attend a luxurious banquet," said Lord Colling-

bourne, "without thinking of the thousands who are going supperless to bed."

That was the sort of tactless disgusting thing you might have expected from Lord Collingbourne.

"Now, my lord duke, my lords—I suppose there are some other lords. I don't know. We can't all be lords—and I, very early in my career, ceased to attach any particular weight to the proud title. Shall I say 'gentlemen'—as covering all grades? Well, gentlemen, a whimsical notion has passed through my mind. I give it merely as a suggestion—that at one of these feasts you should make the guest of the evening—the distinguished visitor of your programme—just an ordinary working man. Don't trouble to invite him specially. Step out into the streets and hail some famished laborer in his toil-stained clothes, and put him on your high seat of honor. He will be an object lesson to you, and you will provide him with food for thought as well as all the meat and drink . . . "

"Oh, shut up and sit down," said someone in a very loud whisper.

The Duke had turned completely round in his chair; people were purposely scraping their chairs upon the parquet floor, were moving their feet, and making the wine glasses clink against the coffee cups.

"I am a working man myself. It is the only title I care about. So you will forgive me for urging the claims of my class. I have four children to support—and I mean them to be working men like their father. They are boys, you will readily perceive. If they were girls, I would bring them up as working women—like their mother . . . "

At last my lord sat down.

The Duke gulped half a glass of champagne which he had previously intended to leave untouched: he drank as one desiring to wash away a nasty taste from the mouth. Almost everyone drank; almost everyone murmured his disgust and stared balefully at lord Collingbourne,—who sat with eyes glittering behind his goggles, while composedly he picked grapes from a desert dish.

"Confound that fellow—he has spoilt the evening."

"Greatly to be regretted."

"Infernal outsider! Ought never to have been brought here."

Then the Duke rose hastily and announced more music—to drive away the echoes of the inharmonious voice.

"Miss Capland—er—Copland. Miss Gladys Copland will kindly give us another song."

"Copland!" said Mr. Malcomson. "My people know a girl called Copland. Wonder if she's any relation."

The girl had come in to sing again; the accompanist was playing the prelude. It was a number that everybody knew—from a successful musical comedy.

"Life is what we choose to make it—vile or pure.
We can break the chains of habit—I am sure."

The trumpery tune had a good swing to it; the silly words fitted the melody; the recurrent phrase, "I am sure," fell into its place with a noisy effect of climax that was pleasing to the uncritical ear. "I am sure—yes, I am sure;" and the girl's voice rose strong and true, and the player banged out his chords with vigor and enthusiasm.

Seymour Charlton was watching the girl as if she had hypnotized him. She did not seem to him exactly pretty: she was tall and well-shaped, but slender. Her black dress probably made her seem thin—and it made her neck and breast seem strangely white. She had fair hair, and kind grey eyes. She wore a little gold chain round her white neck, and from the chain there hung a heart-shaped ornament that rose and fell upon her bosom as she drew her breaths. Really that was all concerning her appearance that he observed while he sat spellbound, listening, wondering; but from her and her song there flowed to him—for him only—a message that he clearly understood.

Far deeper than just now there came in his thoughts the wave of sadness. In broad sweeping light he could see to the ends of the earth, and everywhere the intolerable sadness

"From her and her song there flowed to him . . . a message that he clearly understood."

of life and its crushing futileness—myriads of aimless men, now moving now resting, without purpose, without knowledge of what they are doing, yet in truth all doing the same thing—like ants on millions of ant-heaps, wriggling, struggling, fighting amidst futilities until they have buried themselves beneath the futilities, and the light can reach them and stir them no more. Then this is the message, loud and clear: To shake off the self-imposed burdens, be rid of all futilities, cut yourself clear from the aimless struggling mob and stand or move alone—with at most one other by your side.

"We can break the chains of habit—I am sure.
I am sure. Yes, I am sure."

The player struck his noisiest chords; the song was done and the singer withdrew, rewarded by hearty applause. This hired song-bird had roused and cheered the company. The tactless, blatant lord was forgotten; all were chatting again gaily and contentedly.

"But we don't want to sit here for ever."

"Oh, what's all the hurry? I suppose the Duke will give us the move soon."

For Seymour Charlton the spell of this second song did not quickly fade. Looking about him and listening to all the men's voices, he could see and hear nothing but ugliness.

"Oh, do tell us. This is very interesting. In all your adventures you were never afraid once?"

The leg-pulling youth after repeated efforts had got Sir Gregory Stuart in full swing. All self-made men will boast if you make them, and now Sir Gregory was boasting handsomely. He had told them that he made himself, and was proud to own it. No one had helped him; he had come right through to—"Well, what I am." And in this progress from squalor to luxury, he had encountered every conceivable peril—swimming in the open sea, running the gantlet of scalp-greedy Indians, sleeping among plague-stricken refugees—fire, earthquake, tornado, what not.

"And never afraid?"

"I made up my mind at the start," said Sir Gregory vainGloriously, "that I had only one stake to play—my own life—and I put that up and gambled for all it was worth. I meant to win; but if I couldn't win, I meant to lose the stake. Ask any gambler and he'll tell you the same thing. You can't be afraid after you've made up your mind—like that."

"Wonderful. Do tell us some more."

Then unexpectedly Sir Gregory contradicted himself.

"Yes—by God—I was afraid once—cursedly afraid;" and he hit the table with his open hand, and laughed.

"You surprise me. How was that?"

"I ought to have remembered—when I was bucking. I was so much afraid that I am afraid to this day if I think of it," and he laughed again. "Look here. It was when I was a nipper. We were living in a dirty little shanty in the middle of a big town."

The fashionable doctor looked at him curiously. Sir Gregory apparently possessed a robust constitution and a well-preserved frame; he carried his wine easily. But now, in a moment, had the wine proved too much for him? Very curious!

"Behind our hovel there was a disused graveyard, and we kids made it our playground whenever we could—climbed the wall and played hide and seek among the gravestones—till we heard the peeler's footsteps coming down the passage behind the rusty iron railings. Peeler used to turn his bull's-eye lantern on us."

"Why a lantern? Couldn't he see you?"

"It was dark. At night. Didn't I say that? We could only do it at night. It wasn't safe in the daytime. But as soon as it was dark we nipped in. We seemed to have no fear of the dead men. . . . One night something startled us—and we legged it back to the wall. I was the youngest, not so quick as they, and I got to the wall last of the lot—and tried to scramble over. I had done it again and again, but now I could not pull myself up. Poor little devil that I was—a dreadful fear had seized me . . . I thought the dead men were holding my legs—pulling me back by the heels. I tore my

hands and barked my knees, and hung there bellowing—certain that the dead men had caught me—would drag me down by the heels into the rotten stinking graves. . . . "

The doctor, with the utmost interest, was observing Sir Gregory. His forehead showed profuse perspiration; his red face had become almost pallid; the coarse strong hand which he stretched across the table was trembling slightly. All very curious! The doctor, as though mechanically, had taken a siphon and filled a tumbler with soda water. Smiling, he handed the glass to Sir Gregory.

"Thanks . . . Yes, I was in a blue funk that once—and no mistake."

Seymour Charlton had not listened to Sir Gregory's rambling reminiscences. He was making excuses to his host for leaving the party. He felt a headache: he would take a stroll and then return.

"You won't chuck us for the supper?" said Malcomson anxiously. "You'll come back for Teddy Wace's supper?"

Seymour promised that without fail he would come back in good time for the supper.

"All right, old boy," said Malcomson. "Join us at the Games Club—you know, St. James's Square. The Duke will give us the move directly—and we shall look in there before we go on to Teddy's."

It was an immense relief to gain the open air. Seymour stood on the threshold of the picture gallery, and watched the traffic of Regent Street while he waited. The hall porter said the young lady was still in the building, and this was the only way out of it. The clatter of horses' feet, the rattle of wheels, even the buzz and racket of motors, were refreshing sounds after the babel of foolish tongues; the sky was better to look at than a glass roof. He watched the changing faces as they passed in the lamplight: all the world seemed hurrying to and fro—aimlessly hurrying to reach a goal chosen for them by blind chance.

Presently the girl appeared, in hat and jacket, with music case under her arm.

"Miss Copland! Forgive my stopping you—But I wanted to say how much I admired your singing."

"Oh, thank you. And did the others like it?"

"How could they help liking it?"

"I thought they didn't care about my first song. Mr. Lowry thought so, too."

"No, they loved it."

"They seemed to applaud just from politeness—but I was afraid you were all bored. The applause after the second song seemed more genuine. I hoped so—but I was so nervous. Something had upset me."

The girl spoke eagerly and anxiously. The fever of her effort was upon her; she had endeavored to please, but was doubtful if she had succeeded.

"Thank you very much," she said gratefully; and she turned away and walked on.

"Are you going to sing anywhere else this evening?"

"Oh, no."

"I thought, if you were, I would follow you—and hear you sing again, if I might."

"No, I am going straight home now."

He walked with her, and she hurried on.

"Where is home?"

"A long way off . . . Chelsea."

"Let me see you home——"

"Oh, no," and the girl stopped. "Please don't come any further with me.'

"But you can't go such a long distance by yourself. Let me call that hansom. Let me drive you to your door."

"I shall get an omnibus in Piccadilly—and that will drive me to my door."

"Where is your door? I'm sure omnibuses don't go to it."

She met his eyes quite fearlessly, and her voice had a tone of sudden weariness.

"I live in the King's Road—with my father. Please don't follow me. I thought you only meant to be kind—and polite —or I shouldn't have spoken to you. Can't you see I'm not —the sort of person—you, you expected?"

"Yes you are—exactly. Miss Copland, look at me again. Can't you see that I am not meaning to be impertinent—really and truly? On my honor, I wouldn't worry you—but I want to talk to you. I must talk to you."

Hurrying people elbowed them; the women of the streets, pacing slowly as they approached the brighter lamps of Piccadilly Circus, stared at them thoughtfully while he pleaded with desperate earnestness.

"What is it you want to talk about?"

"All sorts of things. Yourself—myself. And your singing—all about your singing. Nothing else, if you say I'm only to talk of that."

"Very well," said the girl wearily.

Seated by her side in the cab, he became silent. He had overcome the first great obstacle of her resistance, and it was as if, in persuading her to let him be with her for a little while, he had at once achieved all his purpose and exhausted all his energy.

But soon they were both talking, and it seemed to him that he had discovered a reflection of his own state of mind—profound sadness, complete disillusionment.

The drive was too quickly over.

"Now tell him the number," she said. "Two hundred and twenty A, the furniture shop—on the right—after the next corner."

"Are we there already? I should have liked to drive for hours."

"I have enjoyed it," she said simply. "I love driving . . . Now stop, please."

The cabman had taken them past the furniture shop. Seymour walked along the pavement with her to the dingy side door by the white shop-front.

"You'll remember my name—Seymour Charlton?"

"Thank you for taking the trouble to bring me home. Goodbye."

"No. Not goodbye."

"Yes—goodbye."

She was about to ring the door bell, but he took her hand

and prevented her. She turned to him, and disengaged her hand.

"What is it?"

"I want to see you again," he said earnestly. "Will you be my friend?"

"I wonder what you mean by that?"

"Will you let me see you again?"

The light from a street lamp was full upon them, as she looked at him steadily and studiously; and he read in her pale face, weariness, kindness, and sweetness.

"Answer me this truly," she said, after hesitating. "Are you really unhappy—or do you only say it?"

"No—it is true."

"Then yes—I will see you again. I should like to see you again."

"When?"

"Whenever you wish. Write to me here—and tell me where we are to meet. It must be somewhere near here—the Embankment."

As he drove back, he thought of this new acquaintance with a curious thrill of surprise and delight. In half an hour the night had changed for him—romance, gentle sentiment, keen interest had come where all was vulgar, meaningless, and dull. His depression had gone from him: he was light-hearted, easy, at peace with the world.

The cab bowled along smoothly, and the rhythmical beat of the iron shoes upon the asphalt was a cheerful sound. Half an hour ago he could see only ugliness: now, wherever he turned his eyes, there was beauty. That was because there had happened to him something of the utmost importance. The girl's pale face, low sweet voice, all that she said, had charmed him and soothed him. In everything she had exactly responded to his mood. It pleased him to believe that a miracle had been worked for him; that fate had brought them together, for sympathy and solace, because both felt sad and helpless in the midst of the noisy, unthinking crowd.

The night was exquisite now—silent and calm, with a cool

breeze to meet one in all open spaces. As the cab rattled over the uneven wood blocks by the gate of St. James's Park, he smiled with contentment and admiration. In front of Buckingham Palace the electric light was so brilliant that one could distinguish the gay colors of the flowers, showing clearly against white balustrades; from the broad new road came the whirr of many wheels, and the carriage lamps were like sparks growing into dazzling flame as they swiftly approached; faces revealed themselves for an instant, and vanished as the wheels rolled by; beneath the trees men on foot were black and indistinct, like hurrying ghosts; and beyond the dark branches and foliage, there was lamplight flickering on the water. Ahead, at the end of the broad straight road, the sky was lit by the yellow flare of the streets—the fire-cloud that hangs over all big cities.

Pall Mall was full of carriages, motors, and cabs; the theatres had just released their audiences; people were hastening to the restaurants. It was twenty minutes past eleven. Seymour must look for his friends at the club in St. James's Square. He wished that he had not been rigorously bound by the evening's programme; that he had never surrendered himself to the excessive hospitality of Messrs. Malcomson and Wace.

Distaste and repugnance seized him as a servant took his hat and coat, and led him towards one of the inner rooms of the establishment. A dreadful hot blast of vitiated air came from the open door, with the reek of tobacco smoke, the sound of loud voices, and the distant click of billiard balls. It was as if for a brief respite he had escaped from the futilities, and now the futilities claimed him again.

Lord Collingbourne, clinging to the other men, had come on from the dinner; and here, in the jovial, sporting, unprejudiced society of the Games Club, it appeared that my lord was being tolerated and encouraged. Prominent in a group of amused members he stood, with his back to an empty fireplace, loudly spouting—slanging his order, slanging social conventions, slanging everything.

Aware immediately of his half-brother's presence, he affected

not to have remarked the new arrival, and, pretending to talk to these affable strangers, really talked at Seymour.

"No, I was never good at the lick-spittling, hanging-on, humble-pie business. That's why I dropped out of the upper circles. *Noblesse oblige.* Yes, what does that mean? Eat any dirt to keep a good coat on your back and wear a shiny topper. If you're a nobleman's son, keep your nails clean and always wash with scented soap; and, if anybody asks you to work for your living, say 'I'm very sorry but I can't work, I can only eat—on account of my exalted position. Examine my nice hands. Providence didn't make them for work—but to stroke the young ladies' back hair, or hold an old woman's skein of wool'."

Then my lord turned, and, nodding to his brother, began to laugh.

"Hullo, Seymour, I didn't see you. Hope you haven't taken all that to your address. . . . You know your own business," he added carelessly. "One man's meat is another man's poison. You're an example of good form and all the rest of it—the good boy who lives at home with Papa."

Seymour, looking for Malcomson, did not answer; but Lord Collingbourne continued aggressively.

"How is the old scoundrel?"

Thus, as always suited Lord Collingbourne's humor, he caused a little scandalous altercation for the amusement of the bystanders.

"How's the old scoundrel getting along—still cheating the devil of his due?"

Seymour had come close to Collingbourne, and he spoke in a low voice.

"Are you talking of your father?"

"Yes—of course."

"Then please to remember he is my father, also."

"Oh, we all know that. I trust you thrive on it."

"I suppose you are drunk—I hope you are drunk. But, drunk or sober, you'll not insult my father in my presence. Understand that."

Seymour turned his back, and moved away; Collingbourne

gave a rasping, noisy laugh; and, somewhat to the surprise of attentive spectators, the little incident closed without a scrap. Members of the Games Club had, in their own phrase, expected to see somebody sit down on the nearest spittoon.

A few minutes later, when Mr. Teddy Wace was marshalling his supper guests, Lord Collingbourne again accosted his brother. It was in the cloak-room—all among the hats and coats—that my lord suddenly exhibited what seemed like contrition.

"Seymour," he said, "don't be rusty. I didn't mean anything. You're all right. You were always a good sort—in the past. My infernal temper. It's health—rotten health," and he began to cough. "I sha'n't last long," and he smiled deprecatingly. "That's what makes me so riled with that old sinner—Well—we're all sinners—With the poor old fellow."

"Yes, that's better."

"Look here!" Lord Collingbourne's harsh voice unmistakably carried real feeling. "For auld lang syne, Seymour, don't be rusty." And all among the hats and coats they shook hands. "For auld lang syne bear me a good heart, as the fortune-tellers say—and if the chance ever comes, do a good turn to my children."

Seymour was touched by something pathetic in the appeal. Perhaps the habitual bad temper and all other idosyncrasies sprang from physical weakness. He grasped the offered hand affectionately; but, as he followed his friends, he heard again the epithet of beast applied to his brother.

"Teddy, for God's sake, don't ask that beast Collingbourne to supper."

"No dashed fear," said Teddy in his fat, full, chuckling voice.

Truly the Viscount Collingbourne was a well-disliked man.

Driving presently with Malcomson to Teddy's rooms in Bond Street, Seymour saw my lord once again.

With his Inverness cloak over his shoulder, his Homburg hat at the back of his head, he was roughly pushing through the crowd on the pavement. Then, while foot passengers

were waiting for carriages to pass, he came into the middle of the road to harangue the police constable and the sergeant who hastened to join his subordinate. He was brandishing arms, pointing, spouting—complaining that the traffic is inadequately controlled, that the Metropolitan Police are a disgrace to civilization, that his heart aches for all beggars, cripples, and harlots at the mercy of such helmeted fools. This was how Lord Collingbourne wore out the patience of the Force—until they *had* to run him in. To-night he was plainly tempting fate. Seymour wondered.—Would he get safely to the obscure neighborhood on the south side of the river where he lived with his common wife; or would one read in the morning's newspaper—"Nobleman creates disturbance in Piccadilly"?

Seymour was thinking of this, and not listening to Malcomson while he gave with exuberant friendliness much valuable information.

"What a lark we're having! Good old Teddy! He always does things in style. . . . By Jupiter, wasn't that gallery hot? But you weren't bored, were you? Now we're in for a good thing, anyhow;" and he ran over the names of the pretty ladies who were coming to Teddy's supper. "Doris Baronscourt, Effie Forshaw, Millie Mansell—You know the ropes. Millie is our host's fancy. But there are plenty of the unattached." And he recited the unattached. "Mrs. Vincent, Mrs. Spalding, Edie Danvers. They say Sir Gregory Stuart is after Edie. They say, if Sir Gregory takes a fancy, he don't mind how much money it costs him—although he's married, with a large family, and all the rest of it. . . .

"*You* see. Old Ted will do the thing in style. Bouquets for every girl—and a jewelled bangle round the stems, I shouldn't be surprised. Or the French rolls wrapped up in bank notes. You wait and see."

The rooms of Mr. Wace, the opulent stockbroker, extended over the whole first floor above a shop in Bond Street. They were spacious and extravagantly furnished, and his supper party was like his furniture: collected at considerable ex-

pense, with very little taste. Several of the pretty ladies were of what may be termed post-card rank. These were actresses, perhaps more famous from their photographs than from natural or acquired talent. Others of the ladies were not on the stage. All the ladies had extremely good manners; they smiled and adjusted their bracelets, and fanned themselves with a sort of swooning refinement that would have been creditable in duchesses.

One was a lady whom Seymour had known well. "Of-ten and of-ten," said this lady, ceremoniously pronouncing the t in the word, "have I asked fellers whatever had become of you." She was about thirty, but she still preserved a blonde plumpness, a pinkness and whiteness, that attracted innumerable admirers. She called herself Mrs. Fielding, but she was probably as yet a spinster.

Soon the guests were at table and the hired waiters busily engaged. The ladies became shrill in ecstasy when they saw all the bouquets. They trailed the long ribbons, cut them with a knife and tied them in bows as favors on the men's arms—they were far too grand ladies to show disappointment at finding no presents. They shook the napkins for those most winning of billets-doux—bank notes. But there was nothing. "Could you believe it?" Nothing at all. Nevertheless they laughed amiably, if somewhat shrilly. Teddy was doing things well, but not up to best form.

And once more the champagne was poured out and gulped avidly. Here were the same men who had dined together such a little while ago—red-faced Sir Gregory, the facetious young ass, the city people, two guardsmen: nearly all here had been at the dinner. It seemed incredible that men could drink again so soon. Yet more monstrous was it to see them eating. Cutlet again, quail again, chaudfroid again—devoured as if by farm laborers after the long day's toil afield. "I say"—and fingers are snapped—"I say. Get me some more of that asparagus. . . . Very good asparagus, Teddy, old man." Thus the feast goes on.

Outside the open windows there is the occasional slam of cab doors, or the snorting of a motor; but as the brief May

night draws away before the dawn, silence holds the streets and pavements. Further off, in St. James's Park, the wheels have ceased to roll upon the new road; there is silence as of death. The lamplight flickers on the water; and hungry wretches, forbidden to lie down and sleep, shuffle along the paths, wait anxiously for daylight, and pray for treasure-trove—crusts carried by greedy dogs and left untasted in the damp grass.

"No more, Teddy, old boy. I couldn't. I really couldn't."

Cigars again, coffee again, liqueurs again. Nearly all the men are getting drunk now; and the women, too—in a lady-like graceful way.

And to Seymour, at the table—and again in the front room as he sat on a sofa while Teddy played the piano with deft, hairy, ringed hands, and two post-card actresses danced and kicked their legs,—sadness came flowing in deep waves to drown him.

This is life—his life: ugly, vapid, futile, insanely aimless. The music made him think of the girl and her song. Already the pale, sad face was almost obliterated by later images; the tone of her kind sweet voice was almost forgotten; the feeble verses of her song were slipping from his memory. "We can break the chains of habit—I am sure." Yes, those were the words.

The blonde woman who had know him in ancient days was delighted to meet him. Mrs. Fielding, as she called herself, was one of the unattached. She came, smiling, and rallied him amiably.

"There you are—you old long-face—like a mute at a funeral." Then she sat by him on the sofa and talked—talked to him unceasingly,—more and more explicitly offering to renew the bond that was so easily severed. "That's just how you used to be—I christened you Sad-face. You haven't changed. Lord, I *am* glad to see you again. I always think of you different to the others. I was sorry to lose sight of you. You know, I think you treated me rather mean. Own you did." She pressed against him slightly with her bare shoulder; she blinked her eyelashes; drew back her pink and

white face, and looked at him with half-closed eyes; shook the silver beads and sham pearls on her blue satin bodice, and beat time to the dance with her blue satin shoes. "You were jealous, weren't you—about that other feller? That silly juggins—I don't even remember his name. Lord, I cared more for your little finger than twenty such as him. Come and see me again, will you? I'll give you the address. I've moved—twice, since then. I'm proud of my little flat. Oh, I *have* done it up pretty. . . . Look here, I haven't got my brome to-night. My coachman is ill—so I sent 'im 'ome. You shall get me a cab and drive back with me, and just look at my little flat—will you?"

Thus she ran on—interminably. . . . "I'm sick of this for one. I don't want to stay here all night. I'm ready to go whenever you give the word."

Seymour, leaning back on the sofa, wooed by this tawdry siren, felt his thoughts scattered, broken, destroyed. He answered wearily yet politely—vaguely but gallantly.

As last the party showed some signs of dispersal. The atmosphere was hot and heavy; there were clouds of tobacco smoke—no open windows could fight against them. Teddy was still magnificent, with shirt front unrumpled, button-hole unfaded, jewels of rings and studs glittering; but his india-rubber mask was becoming bluer and bluer. He was so hirsute that he always shaved twice a day, and his beard was growing fast. With the stump of a cigar protruding upward from beneath his black moustache, he sat at the piano and banged a noisy breakdown. A lady danced wildly, if not indecorously. Half the men were quite drunk, but able to stand and shout and clap their hands. The women had dark circles round their eyes, and voices rendered hoarse by the foul air and the dust that rose from Teddy's Aubusson carpet. Sir Gregory was sleeping—open-mouthed, head back; like a dead man, but for his snores.

And once more Seymour thought of the singing girl. It seemed years ago now; but in a moment the spell returned, stronger, deeper than ever—a message of sadness, purity, and courage. It was as if she had come into the room and

was singing to him. He could see her—the little gold heart, the gold chain, rising and falling on the immature bosom as she drew her breaths.

The party was dispersing. Down below at the street door they passed out into grey shadows, faint silver dusk, and felt the cold touch of dawn on their heated foreheads. The street was so silent that laughing voices were hushed; people whispered as if they had entered a church. The drivers of the little broughams, the cabs, the motors, and the electric landaulettes, drowsily stretched themselves, and the vehicles moved slowly in response to the discreet summons of Teddy's servants. But upstairs Teddy was thumping out "God Save the King"—a gushing fountain of noise until the very last guest should have gone.

Seymour put his lady into a four-wheeler, shut the door upon her, paid the driver. She was angry.

"Aren't you coming, too?"

He stammered an apology.

"Well, you *are* mean. You *are* a kill-fun. . . . Anyhow, you might have found that out before. You needn't have monopolized me all the time. . . . "

He walked away, by the shuttered shops, across Berkeley Square, to the great stone fortress which he was allowed to call home, and which all the world knows as Andover House. At high noon it looks sombre and forbidding. Whenever you approach the corner, the blank side wall frowns upon the archway and the mews; and the noble classical front, with its pedimented windows, niches, and vases, seems always in shadow. Now it filled the street with gloom, as if making the night afraid to leave it although the day had dawned. This was his father's house—one of the five really great houses of Mayfair,—a house so splendid that no one would think of effecting entrance with a latchkey. Seymour rang an electric bell, and stood watching the iron tracery and the glass in the panels of the big door. Within, it was dark as the family vault at Collingbourne.

Soon a light showed. The night watchman was coming with

his lantern—flashing light on the black and white pavement of the hall and the vestibule, cautiously and noiselessly opening inner and outer doors.

The watchman, conducting the late comer, switched on electric light in the hall, and the heavy grandeurs of the place dimly disclosed themselves—marble hearth and overmantel, statues, wide staircase with gilded balustrade slowly rising on either hand: pomp-full space and massive ornament, as in a dismal old palace. The watchman paused, talked to Seymour respectfully and yet familiarly—whispered all the news of the dismal old palace.

"His lordship has been very queer, sir. Rang his bell for Mr. Schuman at ten p.m. and ordered the carriage. Says he'll take the drive. Mr. Schuman went to Lady Emily—but her ladyship couldn't pacify him. Then the order comes down: Fetch Dr. Prescott. The doctor comes round from Hertford Street and says it best be done—The men was going to bed at the stables—but they brought the carriage round by 11.10, and Dr. Prescott went the drive with them—down to Kensington, across the park, and back by Oxford Street. Got back 12.7—a.m. . . . Are you ready, sir?"

And the watchman silently led the way up the grand staircase, holding his lantern high—upward, past many dim grandeurs, past the lofty corridor that gave access to his lordship's rooms—where the owner of all these pomps was muttering and moaning in the fitful sleep of senile decay,—up and up, through the darkness, till they came to the grey shadows and the silver light again, at the very top of the house.

It was broad daylight in the room used by Seymour. He pulled aside the white curtains and looked out of the open casement. Sunlight was shining on the blackened cornice above his head, and breaking on the broad stone ledge that ran round the house below these upper windows. The pigeons flew with noisy wings from their roosting place on the ledge or in the cornice. The pigeons were suffered at Andover House—never by any chance molested. It was a tradition of the great house. And younger sons, cousins,

noble but impecunious old friends, were, traditionally, like the pigeons, suffered to roost somewhere under the roof.

The sunlight streamed in as Seymour lay down to rest; and the pigeons, beating their wings, aimlessly circled round the house—with the wide world to fly over, seemed tied to the house by invisible threads. The room contained all his belongings: many suits of clothes in the wardrobes; guns somewhere; a sword or two; whips and spurs; boots to ride in, shoot in, dance in—a paint-box somewhere; manuscripts; books sparsely annotated by a careless hand—innumerable photographs of women, left him as records of light, transient loves. These were his useless, valueless, incongruous properties —the garnered product of a useless, wasted life. Sleepily looking at some of them in the clear morning sunlight, he had this as his last thought before he slept: Was it too late to make a fresh start—to begin again—at thirty-five?

II

ON the following afternoon he spent a couple of hours with Gladys Copland. He could not trust to the sluggish post office, but sent a special messenger with his note. "I count on your kind promise. From three o'clock I shall be waiting for you in Cheyne Walk. If you do not come to-day, I shall be there to-morrow at the same time. . . . "

It was ridiculous, but his heart beat fast from excitement and anxiety, as the slim figure approached in the sunlight. She had not failed him: his instinct had said she would come to-day if she could possibly do so. But, as they shook hands, he scarcely dared look at her. Would she stand the test of sunlight—would all the charm have gone with the glamor and the mystery of night? Then he thrilled again from pleasure and content.

She was prettier, far prettier, by daylight than by lamplight. She seemed less pale, and in her pallor there was nothing unhealthy: the color glowed and faded quickly

beneath the white, smooth skin. She was dressed simply but prettily, as any well-bred, well-provided girl should dress—one might take her anywhere, without feeling a twinge of snobbish shame or a throb of generous regret because she was not better dressed. She moved with firm, light footsteps; kindness gleamed from her gray eyes; her voice was music; her smile was like the gentle friendly sunshine.

They walked to and fro by the river, sat on a bench beneath the plane trees, and talked to each other with rapidly increasing confidence. Their talk was of thoughts and memories rather than of people and of things; and each time that they reached a point of absolute agreement in feeling and imagination, it was as if they had woven another strand for the rope that already was drawing them together. They could each feel the drag of the rope, and of set purpose both were trying to strengthen it.

She would not go to a tea-shop with him. She must return to drink tea with her father, the furniture dealer, in the King's Road. But she stayed with him by the river to her last free minutes.

He went away from this first interview more than contented. She was a girl in a million. She was the only girl in the universe who had the power to make him, for a little while at least, quite happy. He was sure now that in his need he had found a priceless treasure of grace, intelligence, and sympathy.

Perhaps Seymour Charlton was passing through a very usual mental phase.

He was experiencing that sense of impotence and hopelessness which comes sooner or later to men who make nothing. For years one may evade the odious truth, stifle the inward cravings, and beat down the restless thoughts that spring from defiance of the stupid doom; but at last one recognizes the full measure of the curse that has been laid upon mankind. We must work. If we will always play, our play becomes as the most deadly and crushing labor—the turning of disconnected wheels, the carrying of water in sieves, the threshing

of winds. And the work must be to create something out of the surrounding void; or, if you cannot create, to bring some order in the chaos of others' creation. But that is less satisfying. Deep in all men's breasts lies the dread of the phantasmal, illusory nature of their own existence. Few men analyze their thoughts, or trace to its clouded source the fear that tinges their brightest hopes and proudest boasts; but in effect each honest toiler expresses the fear. This house I built—these fields I ploughed. These poor books I wrote—look at them on the shelf. To these children I gave breath—look at them. This—poor as it may be—is my work. Look at it—the something made by me in my flash of reflected light that glimmered in the unfathomable darkness. Thus and so far have I satisfied this human need: to fight against the dream, and give reality to life by clinging to something solid in the midst of the all-embracing shadows.

Seymour could not say this. Behind him there was nothing; before him there stretched the void.

His career had been governed by chance, crippled by trivial and yet sordid necessities. Eton—five terms at Christ Church with two Militia trainings, the Foot Guards for three years; and then a budget of small debts, and sudden impossibility to maintain himself in the Brigade because Lord Brentwood, having a niggardly fit, would not give him enough money. If he might not be a soldier, he thought he would be an artist. Paris to study art after a little drawing from the antique at the British Museum, and a little daubing from the life in subscription classes. Then he was freakishly summoned home by Lord Brentwood to go into the Yeomanry and to contest a Midland constituency. But all was stopped again—another niggardly fit made Lord Brentwood shy at the expense. Then the South African War gave him an opportunity for excitement and adventure; he had six months in the field among irregular horsemen, four months on his back with enteric, and two protracted sea voyages.

After that came idleness, society, women, and successful, if unsubstantial love. Then Paris as permanent abode—writing poetry and *pensées*—trying to write in French, and

even publishing stray essays in Parisian journals. Then again the check of insufficient means—supplies altogether failing; and he had come back to hang about London, to go out of it for a little hunting on hirelings, a little shooting with a borrowed servant to load for him, a long cruise on a rich friend's yacht if ever a berth was offered him.

He had three hundred a year of his own, left to him by his mother, and no more; and Lord Brentwood, growing older, crankier, more difficult, gave him less and less money to eke out his pittance. Fifty at a time—and the times not too near together—had become Lord Brentwood's standard estimate of the aid required by a smart man about town who was also the son of a noble and immensely important family.

From the materials furnished by such inconstant guidance, such feeble startings and premature stoppings, such diverse and undeveloped experience, such odds and ends of motive and balked effort, Seymour had been called upon to build up his character. He was clever, and imaginative, in a dreamy, unproductive way, and inherently honest and kind, if without power always to manifest these qualities.

Outwardly, he was what most women would call a handsome man. Many women had thought him, proved him to be, dangerously handsome. He had a narrow, cleanly modelled face, a good straight nose—not beak-like as his father's and his brother's,—a broad but not high forehead, with good perceptive ridge; dark hair turning grey above the ears, small moustache; and a somewhat melancholy smile—flicker of full understanding rather than of mirth. He was habitually a silent man—except with those whom he knew and liked well.

It was Lady Emily Charlton, his middle-aged step-sister, who had invited him to lodge at Andover House.

"Do," said Lady Emily kindly, "if it is any convenience to you. And it seems such a pity not to use even one of those rooms upstairs. They were all used in the old days."

And Lady Emily, who habitually spoke of the past with sentimental regret, recalled the names of some who had not vacated their free lodgings till banished from them by death.

Dear Lord Augustus, our whiskered, padded, diplomatist cousin; Admiral Charles, the brave but intemperate sea-dog, another of our cousins; The Honorable and Reverend Canon William, Papa's own younger brother; and so on.

Seymour thanked his sister gratefully. Without doubt the arrangement would be most convenient to him personally; but would Papa approve it?

"Of course," said Lord Brentwood to his beloved Lady Emily. "Why not? Doesn't he live here now? He's always here—badgering me for money. Tell him to come, of course —but, Emmie, tell him he won't get any more out of me. I can't afford more—or he should have it."

In this gracious manner Seymour received the benefits of free bed and breakfast, the occasional services of a footman, and the run of his teeth, if he cared to take it, at Lady Emily's modest table. With gratitude he accepted his bed and breakfast; but he rarely troubled the footman, and never obtruded himself on Lady Emily.

"I hope," said Lord Brentwood, when he met his son on the stairs, "that they make you comfortable up there." This was what he had always said in the old days to a lodger—admiral or diplomatist—whom he chanced to meet on the stairs.

The fact was that Lord Brentwood, with advancing years, had lost interest in this young son of his. Once he had hoped that the boy would save him from annoyance and mortification, and then he had felt keen interest; but now all the hope was destroyed. The hope had been that this boy would succeed him as sixth lord of the august line.

When Seymour was eighteen there seemed to be every chance of his outliving the heir-apparent, and reigning one day as princely head of the Charltons. Collingbourne had already published his wicked political creed, had made irreconcilable war with his father, had disgraced himself in half a dozen different ways and in as many different countries. He had notoriously bad health, but was recklessly adventurous; fond of travelling at lightning speed, a climber of mountains, explorer of deserts, investigator of life among the refuse of

cities. It seemed that at any hour news might flash over the land and under the sea, to tell his native country how Lord Collingbourne had slipped down a precipice, been eaten of sharks, or knocked on the head by bullies in a brothel.

Seymour's mother—delicate, ailing, fading—longed for this to happen. She used to preach to her boy: he must not count on such a dreadful chance, but he must prepare himself for the event. He must learn to be judicious and very benevolent, nobly and wisely to employ all the power and the wealth when they came. These were good kind sermons, and he loved his mother. For a little while he gave himself to the dream. Cousins, aunts, uncles, the whole wide-reaching family, conveyed to him by voice and manner, if not by plain words, that they hailed him as future chief. For a little while it seemed a glorious dream; but he recoiled from the thought that he could ever wish for a brother's death. He had not wished for it, but the thought made him very uncomfortable.

Then came the tidings—by mail and not by wire—that Lord Collingbourne, now in Australia, had married a barmaid. This was the family phrase for the disaster. "He has married a barmaid"—meaning some one of that sort, actress, music mistress, private secretary, some one beneath contempt. The old lord, angry before, was furious, half mad with rage. He hated *mésalliance.*

That, one might say, was the end of all Seymour's chances. The impossible wife and Collingbourne came to London, to live in a humble flat by Battersea Park like quite common people; and child after child was born to them. Three, four, or five boys—why go on counting?

Poor Seymour—as the family said. Did he desire to do so, he could read in their voice and manner how, with the birth of each child, he had sunk a little lower towards complete insignificance. They were as friendly as ever; he might continue to call them all by their Christian names; he might go to all their weddings. They never forgot him when sending out wedding invitations; but he was of less than no importance—not worth a penny Christmas card.

Collingbourne, while in Australia, had worked as a paid hand on a sheep farm; and, curiously enough, this brief experiment was the only real work he had ever done. But he had worked once; he could at any time work again: the episode was sufficient to enable him for ever to describe himself as a workman. Henceforth he became, as it were, an officer in the working army; but he could brag that he had passed through the ranks. With irrepressible energy he spouted his odious socialistic, democratic, anarchic doctrine—No useless mouths; the earth for the toilers; one man as good as another, if not better; and all the rest of it. Soon he found a seat in Parliament; for violent and disrespectful language was accommodated in the Clock Tower; fighting desperately with at least six policemen, was ejected from the floor of the House; was carried in procession by his constituents, who, however, speedily grew weary of their representative and refused to re-elect him. He was more fortunate with the London County Council, in which body he obtained and held membership.

Lord Brentwood was a Liberal. The family were traditionally Liberal. The last lord had been famous, the great Lord Brentwood of the best Liberal era, strong pillar of two Liberal Governments. This present earl had himself been in office: first as under secretary, then as Secretary of State in Mr. Gladstone's unfortunate administration. But the Home Rule split of 1885 forced him into retirement. His political tenets were unshaken: he could not pass over to the other side; his own side had traitorously cast him out. He withdrew, to nurse his wrath in a morose and, to his mind, most noble isolation; or at rare intervals publicly to express his hatred of modern radicals and the new school of change and chance.

One may imagine therefore the horror and disgust with which he heard his son's speeches—the spouting stream of lies and spurious argument which now poured forth in every Laborers' Institute, strike center, and socialist demonstration. The father disowned and abhorred the son. And this ruffianly imbecile, who scoffed and mocked at all things sacred, was to inherit the illustrious name, the legendary

weight, the political status that Andover House itself, and by itself alone, ought to supply. The house had been a Party stronghold. Here, in the magnificent reception-rooms, the Party had traditionally assembled. In the vast dining-room the heads of the Party had been wont to smile upon the rising men of the Party. Lord Brentwood felt that the unavoidable transfer of house and title to Collingbourne and his half-bred spawn would be a national as well as a domestic calamity.

But his predecessor, the good and great Lord Brentwood, had tied up everything with a fatal tightness. All must go to the renegade—London mansion, Collingbourne Court and the extensive Wiltshire estates, the Midland property, the Yorkshire properties, preference stocks and debentures now locked up in the tightly contrived, unassailable trust funds. Everything must go to the next earl, fatally, unavoidably, absolutely, for him to squander or hoard as he pleased. Perhaps it was this angry thought, rather than what Dr. Prescott called senile disconnection of the higher nerve areas, that made his lordship sometimes display a miserly parsimoniousness.

It seemed incongruous and fantastic for anyone residing in Andover House to know even the occasional discomfort of empty pockets. Seymour, daily descending and ascending the grand staircase, could not but feel now and then what is felt by beggars who walk doleless through the wealth and profusion of the town. No money to give away to those who want it, but pots of money to waste on those who could do without it!

Wherever he turned his darkly reflective eyes, he seemed to see the evidence of ample resources; and in many directions he thought he could observe unstinted extravagance. It is the best part of education for one in his circumstances to learn to recognize such phenomena, and not be seriously troubled by personal greed or envy. Sometimes with a sentimental and altogether unselfish interest he studied the house that must so soon now belong to his brother.

Even on the ground floor, out of which the hall took so much space, there was a vast number of rooms: big and little

dining-room, library, cloak-room, and rooms of officials—of Mr. Veale, the over-blown steward or agent, of Mr. Latham, the corpulent house-steward. And Mr. Schuman, my lord's valet, had, forsooth, a sitting-room of his own.

These three were the high officers of the house. They referred people from one to another. "That, sir, would be for Mr. Veale to consider." "That would be Mr. Latham's affair. Would you wish me, sir, to bring the matter to his notice, or would you, sir, speak to him yourself?"

Dr. Prescott of Hertford Street was most civil to them, had ever a nod and a smile at their service. Even the old solicitor, Mr. Killick, senior member of eminent firm, shook hands with them and addressed them by name without assuming an air of condescension. These three were established heads.

In recent years there had been much abatement of household pomp, and many subordinate officers had been discharged—including groom of chambers, hall-porter, secretary-librarian. Of men-servants there were now only butler—a nonentity,—two footmen, odd man, messenger, and the night-watchman, an old retainer from Wiltshire known to Seymour all his life. Yet this reduced staff had nothing to do. My lord lived in his two rooms upstairs. Lady Emily lived in her three rooms, and frequently ate her meals with my lord. Very rarely she asked a few friends to luncheon in the small dining-room. Once perhaps during twelve months, the big dining-room was made ready for a meeting—directors, governors, or well-wishers of charitable organizations dear to Lady Emily; but on these occasions no buffet was considered necessary. The dowdy charitable ladies were not offered so much as a cup of tea and a sweet biscuit; the fusty shabby-coated but shining-hearted gentlemen obtained no sip of negus or refreshing draught of lemonade.

On the first floor, the big reception rooms—three drawing rooms and the saloon—were never opened except to housemaids' brooms and dusters. No doubt a large number of women-servants were still kept; and there were, of course, visible and prominent, Lady Emily's maid and his lordship's

nurse. There was also an invalid housekeeper, good for nothing now except to come down and drink tea with Lady Emily, and talk to her mistress of the past—the grand old days, Collingbourne Court, the happy far-off sunlight that shone when Lady Emily was young.

Her ladyship was supposed to be mistress of the house—because his lordship said so. But, quite obviously, Messrs. Veale, Latham, and Schuman were the real rulers. Lady Emily implicitly trusted the dominant trio, did not wish her faith shaken, was unhappy if you whispered doubt.

"They have been with us so long, Seymour. . . . All is routine—everything was set going by father—and you know what a splendid manager he was. Nothing has been changed. I have been most particular to prevent any altered methods creeping in."

"But, for instance, have expenses gone up or down? Now that you live so quietly, expenses ought to have gone down."

"Oh, surely. Surely yes," said Lady Emily, looking flustered and unhappy. She did not in the least know. "Oh, I am sure they have not gone up. Mr. Veale has promised me that—again and again."

"I only asked," said Seymour smiling, "because father talks so much about being pressed. He says he doesn't know where to look for money."

"Oh, Mr. Killick of course! Mr. Killick is in charge—I mean, over Mr. Veale. Mr. Killick attends to the Bank accounts."

"Then father is not truly harassed, or worried? I hoped it was so—not for my own sake. I have not worried him myself. I hoped that the money difficulty was an innocent self-deception."

Lady Emily's pale blue eyes filled with tears.

"I am afraid, dear Seymour, you must not nowadays take Brendles *au pied de la lettre.*"

Brendles was her absurd pet name for her father. She had invented it when she lisped as a baby learning to talk, when all dreaded my lord's strength of will and sternness of manner, but when she never feared him: she used it now

in his old age, when she alone was left to love and cherish him.

Seymour asked no more questions. It was not his business. He was only there on sufferance. He could have wished that Mr. Veale and the others would divert from the golden river that flowed so easily for them a small trickle for the neglected dependent, himself; but he was of course too proud to beg this grace of them. It had been in his mind to ask Lady Emily about the shooting in Wiltshire. From Richards, the watchman, he knew that Mr. Veale, with a few friends, often went down and shot. He would have enjoyed a day or two, now and then, tramping the woods and fields that he had loved as a boy.

But let them shoot and make their purses. Their reign would soon be over. He could safely leave them for their day of reckoning to the new lord. Short shrift then. In imagination he could hear the rasping voice of the new lord haranguing them—barking himself into fury at the sight of them. "Get out—the lot of you. I'll keep no cats that can't catch mice. I'll have no pot-bellied, beer-swilling, puffy-faced flunkies behind *my* chair. What are you waiting for? You all see the door. You won't better yourself by my-lording me—I'm a working man. You'll get no parting gift from me —unless it is a kick behind." Sentence without trial for the triumvirate when my lord's reign begins.

Lady Emily, who was always kind to her half-brother, still secretly nourished affection for her whole brother. She kept in touch with Collingbourne, and it was probable that she had even communicated with his lowly consort. In her room one day she showed Seymour photographs of the future Viscount and Earl, and his brothers. Jack, aged fourteen, schoolboy at a cheap suburban school; two more schoolboys; and a little chap, frocked and pinafored—four sturdy resolute lives to shut one out for ever.

When Lady Emily spoke of her erring brother, she usually ended with tears. She always apologized for him, plaintively implored tolerance for his faults. Once she gave Seymour a letter to read. It was a letter of thanks to the kind old sister.

"I am making my boy Jack an engineer. I will teach them all to use their hands, and not cringe and whine because people don't come and feed them with a silver spoon. Jack spent the £2 you sent him for an overcoat. . . . "

And then followed a passage that made Lady Emily cry. Colley—as she called him—finished his letter with an ugly gibe at those who live on the fat of the land, and sleep sound on their feather beds, though near relatives starve or freeze.

"Colley says these things—to inflict pain," gasped Lady Emily, with running eyes and sniffs and sobs. "Not really meaning it. But it has grown into a habit—to stab with words—to inflict pain."

Seymour, in his turn, became apologist.

"Well, you know, Emily. He must have such a fight for it—that I suppose the struggle to keep going, with all that family, has absolutely upset his power to judge his best friends."

"That's it, Seymour dear. Only that—kind of you to say it."

"How the dickens *does* he rub along, Emily? Poor beggar—it must be an awful struggle."

"But he has his income, Seymour—quite a good income—from the Trust funds. Didn't you know that?"

"No. You see, I know very little of our family affairs, Nobody has ever troubled to tell me."

"Mr. Killick would tell you everything."

"I'm glad that Collingbourne and his young 'uns aren't likely to starve. Besides, when one comes to think of it, he could always raise money—on the succession."

Lady Emily might not be strong intellectually, but in sentiment she was staunch and true.

She was tall and very thin—with grey hair severely parted in the middle and drawn back over her ears, with pale eyes, and thin beak-nose. Her hands were all bone; one shoulder was slightly higher than the other; and there was some trifling lameness that produced a hop in her gait as she hurried along the passages. She wore dreadful old gowns, and carried shawls about her neck—a grey old ghost of what she had once been, in youth and hope and joy.

Yet she could be almost splendid—for Court, ball or concert

—when summoned by a family call to go forth as elderly spinster chaperon of some tender young cousin. Servants, carrying my lord's supper tray, and coming upon her in the corridor, would draw back, startled by the apparition—diamonds and pearls—grey satin and lace—nodding feathers! And the limp seems conquered; the scraggy shoulders are on the same level; she is holding herself upright, as she goes in to bid goodnight to Papa.

The old man sits in the big chair, grumbling; but his eyes light up at sight of Emmie. Mr. Schuman withdraws and the nurse stands at a distance by the curtained window, while my lord praises his favorite child.

"Beautiful, Emmie! Lovely pretty dress! A picture, Emmie!"

"I'd rather be sitting here with you, Brendles;" and she stoops to kiss the wrinkled parchment of his forehead.

"No, my dear. I'll do very well. Go and enjoy yourself. It's right—to enjoy life. We have only one life—for balls and concerts, Emmie—for feathers, for pretty dresses," and he begins to cough.

Only one life, and she had given it all to him. Nothing of it was left now that could be of use to any one else. There was a nobility in the completeness of her abnegation; and it was touching to see them together, to hear the love vibrating in her voice as she used his pet name. She drove with him, walked with him as long as he could walk, read aloud to him for hours at a time, played childish games with him—draughts, old maid, beggar my neighbor. She tried always to let him win, but was too honest and simple to cheat, and thus baffle fortune if it favored her.

He threw the cards at the fire sometimes, and put her into disgrace for beating him: sulked, asked for Schuman as companion, and banished her from the room. Lady Emily went away, to weep through a sad evening; to return, with red eyes and her thin nose swollen, when summoned for reconciliation.

Two or three times in a year, acting as usher or master of ceremonies, she introduced Seymour to the room. She had

prepared her father for the visit, and would leave Seymour outside the open door while she entered to announce his approach.

"Seymour is here. Will it tire you to see him—for a few minutes? . . . Come in, Seymour."

"Well, Seymour," the old boy used to say dejectedly. "What's the best news with you?"

Then Seymour, after making conversation for a few minutes, was dismissed. He endeavored to come provided with some little anecdote, or the report of inquiries from a venerable and ancient friend. But my lord's attention quickly wandered, and he would usually cut the anecdote short.

"Where's Schuman? Will ye have the kindness to ring the bell. I want that man of mine."

He resembled his eldest son in the big nose, the strong eyebrows, and the hard straight lines of the mouth which age could not soften. But the hair in the eyebrows and on the sides of the bald head was like cotton wool and white silk. Only in streaks of his short scrubby beard had the hair retained any of its dark color. Like Collingbourne, he wore spectacles; and from the deep-set eyes there came a feeble glitter to remind one of Colley's fierce stare.

"I want my man, Schuman," he continued querulously. "He is a very good servant when he chooses, but he neglects me. My nurse neglects me. Your sister is the only faithful one. Emmie never neglects me. . . . "

"Goodbye, Seymour;" and there was the old grand air in his farewell courtesy. "I hope they make you comfortable—that my people treat you well."

"Oh, yes, thank you, father."

"And money—have you plenty of money?"

"Well, no. I must confess I'm rather——"

But Mr. Schuman had now appeared, and Seymour abruptly stopped his confession.

"Oh. So you have troubled to answer the bell," said his lordship, frowning.

"I came, my lord, the moment I heard the bell."

"Then you can go again, and wait outside. I am talking with Mr. Charlton . . .

" . . . You young men are such infernal spendthrifts. What do you do with your money? Why can't you keep money? Where does it go so fast? Women, eh, Seymour? Cards? What is it drains you dry?"

And then perhaps his lordship fished out of despatch-box or drawer some fifty-pound bank notes.

"I am hard up, myself—deucedly hard up. Will fifty pull you straight? There you are."

And my lord coughed, and leaned back in his chair.

"You're a good-looking fellow, Seymour. It's women, I suppose. The women won't let you alone—eh? You're better looking than most Charltons. Take after your mother. Ah. Your dear mother. . . . Goodbye."

Three months had passed now since Seymour last saw his father. Lord Brentwood was very weak throughout the spring, was not yet strong enough to receive visitors—even his son, for a few minutes. Three months in London do not leave much change out of a fifty-pound note; but his lordship must not be importuned by any insatiable mendicant just now. Yet just now a little ready money was perhaps more essential to one's comfort than at any epoch for years. It is almost impossible to make love effectively on credit.

Seymour's thoughts were entirely absorbed by his dawning friendship with Gladys. He wondered if the friendship would have lingering early stages, or if it would ripen quickly into full power. But what did he mean by friendship?

Certainly not marriage. Of late years he had been less and less entangled by women's toils. The love that used to be given had become too troublesome; the love that is bought had become too expensive. Yet he could not live without some sort of love. Often he had entertained vague hankerings after the peaceful joys of marriage—if without effort he should ever find anybody disposed to accept such a pauper. If some kind healthy innocent cousin, with say two thousand a year, would obligingly step forward, woo him, and win him—well then, he would make her and himself happy. There was in him no temperamental repulsion against permanent unions

blessed by church and confirmed by law. There could, however, be no question of all that with his Gladys. That would not do in this case.

He did not in truth examine the drift of his intentions. It would be for the girl to decide. Would she give herself at once, without doubts for the future or compacts for the moment? It sometimes happened so. Instinct seemed to whisper that this was what would happen now. He had no base plotting thoughts—of how he might bear down resistance or wear out disinclination. All decisions must rest with her.

He wanted her companionship—of that he was certain; and he was certain of nothing else. The arrangement by which the companionship might be assured would no doubt develop itself naturally, in accordance with her will, and not his.

But, as a first move—a necessity,—he engaged some convenient rooms. If you are going to meet a girl for a stroll in the sunlight and torrents of rain begin to fall, you must have somewhere to take her. And you cannot for ever whisper confidentially in hotels and restaurants. Nice girls have a natural prejudice against going to bachelors' rooms; but they do go—the very nicest of them. And if you can persuade them to go once, they will generally go again.

Seymour took rooms that had often been useful to him, in St. James's Place. Here, in one of three adjoining houses well patronized by noblemen and gentlemen of high repute, he was known and respected; here he would never be dunned for rent, should it not be convenient to settle his account punctually each Saturday. The landlord was Mr. Marlow, now a famous caterer, manager of smart parties, provider of servants, but once called Frederick, the sharpest and best footman that had ever borne entrée dishes at Andover House. He had prospered exceedingly, and he owed all his great success to his own comprehensive powers of organization.

"Glad to see you here again, sir," said Mr. Marlow, encountering his guest in the narrow hall. "I thought you were becoming quite a recluse, sir. Hope his lordship keeps his health, sir."

His manner was respectful but careless—nothing one could

complain of, and nothing one need be grateful for: just the bare deference due to a younger son who is completely out of the running for coronets, large establishments, and wide power of employment.

"I have asked them to send out and buy some flowers—and have pretty kinds of cages, and fruit, ready to bring with the tea—if I come in this afternoon. I suppose I can trust them not to forget."

"You can trust me, sir," said Mr. Marlow. "I shall make a point of seeing that all is as you wish."

Seymour might understand that, no matter whether a man was a duke or a nobody, he could be sure Mr. Marlow the caterer would see to it that he was efficiently served.

He met Gladys two or three times. He was always meeting her; and she came to the rooms once. But she would not come again. She was a very interesting, an extraordinarily interesting, fascinating girl, and day after day he felt more and more drawn to her—but the rooms did not quite meet the case. They were useless as well as costly; so he gave them up.

It was just that—no fault of Marlow's: the rooms did not meet the case.

III

THIS was the life-history of Gladys Copland.

Her father had once enjoyed prosperity. As a furniture seller, house decorator, etc. he was at the top of the fashion; and he could boast in later days that he had been the pioneer for the huge firms now familiar to the world. All London went to his Regent Street shop: it was the right thing to get your house-ugly converted to a house-beautiful by A. W. Copland.

He was a fresh-complexioned, fair-headed, bright-eyed man, with German blood in his veins; an affectionate husband, a

kind father; as to business, untiring and irrepressible. Gladys could dimly remember the luxury as well as the comfort of their home in St. John's Wood. In and about the spacious nurseries she and her sister and her brothers were happy pampered children. There were—according to the precedence given by age—Alfred William, Nathalie, Pelham, Schiller; and Gladys was the youngest and the happiest of the band. But fear might not shake them, sadness dared not touch them —old or young.

The removal from their old home seemed to the innocent children diverting and exhilarating. Young Schiller, when nurse-maids told him authoritatively that Papa was ruined, at first bellowed piteously—thinking, poor boy, that everybody would now go short of food. However, he was soon reassured. Papa was only pleasantly ruined. There would be a small house instead of a big one, plain fare instead of rich fare; but there would still be annual feasts. Christmas would be kept up by Papa with the Anglo-German completeness to which he had accustomed them. Thus reassured, the children gloried in the unexpected move. It was like a trip to the seaside out of season.

Then Copland, rising with admirable quickness from his bad fall in Regent Street, showed himself on his legs at a conspicuous corner of South Audley Street. It was a really smart shop—but, after a year or so, fate moved him on: to humbler quarters at Knightsbridge; and yet again, to the abjectly poor prospect of the King's Road, Chelsea. He fought gamely; but obviously it seemed that the poverty-stricken King's Road shop was the final phase for Copland. He was on the verge of a new bankruptcy always; but he remained energetic, irrepressible, full of fantastic hopes, even in this last phase.

The family lived over the shop, and were still fairly happy. They might, too, have continued to be comfortable, but for the misfortune that Mamma was such a bad manager. Mamma had been an actress—a most celebrated actress, if one might believe Mr. Copland; and no word ever fell from Mamma's lips to suggest that one should not believe him. She was amiable but useless; with a grand manner; utterly impractica-

ble and the grandest nonsense came from her by way of small talk. She could not bring herself down to stern facts, could not order a decent dinner, get broken things mended or dirty things cleaned. Her health was failing, and she looked at life as if through veils formed by rice powder, gaseous fumes from footlights long since extinct, the dust raised by stamping feet that were now themselves gone to dust.

For her elder daughter, Nathalie, there came to the shabby house and shop—most wonderfully and unexpectedly—a husband. Young Mr. Reed of Brisbane entertained the lowest opinion of his future father-in-law; but Brisbane is a long way off, and, when he returned thither, he carried Nathalie with him. He trusted that Papa would never follow to bother them, but he invited the brothers to look them up whenever they wanted change of air.

There was sadnesss now for Gladys: loss of sister, fear for Mother's health; morbid dread of mysterious dangers for brothers. Questions of life were asked by Gladys for the first time. Why sadness encroaching as one grows? Why this dull doubt of the smiling future that promised to bring all things—but perhaps means to bring nothing?

She was very fond of A. W. Copland Senior, and hated to hear A. W. Copland Junior—or anyone else—treat him with a lack of veneration. Mamma spoke of him now and then with a curious candor, but she never failed to praise his good qualities and endowments. Above all, she praised him for his marvellous power of letter-writing.

"Your father won me by his letters. He wrote to me twice a day—morning and evening—the most beautiful language of purest love—adoration. And at last I thought, 'This is a heart of gold!'"

Mr. Copland had said that he would teach his sons the tricks of the trade, and he kept his word. Alas, in this phase, he could show them little else. Only by ruse and bluff could he fill his premises with any sort of stock—and at best he could point at a very small portion of the stock as his own property. He was eager for all agency business,—working for any sort

of commission,—would take up anything with a discount hanging to it. One day he became House-Agent. It was only necessary to paint up the new trade title, procure some printed forms, write innumerable letters, appoint his eldest son manager of House and Estate Agency Department, and give into the charge of the wondering youth two large volumes pompously labelled Town and Country Register. Another day it was Funeral obsequies.

Varied, strange, and deviously twisting were the outlets sought for an unfailing energy. But too soon young Alfred William saw and noted that, whether in agency or simple dealing, Papa was very tricky—perilously tricky. A.W., unfilially critical, saw for himself that what the brother-in-law had said was sound advice. "You'll never do any good with the old man—A dangerous connection for you. Get clear of it."

Too soon there were rows between parent and child. Angry tones made one tremble: Mr. Copland, with inflamed face and excited gestures, came out of the little room behind the shop, and gave loud tongue to his indignation. "You, sir, to sit in judgment? Who are you to tell me this is right and that is wrong? My own son insults me"——

Alfred William packed his trunk, went to Brisbane to call on Nathalie's husband, and there was more sadness for Gladys. Incomprehensible pain of life—Our dear ones are wrenched from us.

After another year Pelham Copland set out for Australia to join his elder brother, who had prospered. "The Guv'nor," said Pelham, "is too clever by half. I expect it was just his cleverness that tripped him up in Regent Street. . . . Take care of the poor mater." Mrs. Copland's health was failing fast; Pelham had vanished; Schiller was moody and discontented; Gladys could not shake off dark thoughts as easily as hitherto.

With every breach of the home circle, it seemed that her affection and respect for her father became strengthened. He was like the captain of a sinking ship: all might swim away to safety, but he must remain faithful to his command. She

admired him for his bravery, hopefulness, untiring toil—refused to entertain unkind doubts when brothers spoke ill of him.

Now that mother was not well enough to accompany him, he took his daughter on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings for long walks about the great town. And as he walked, he talked incessantly—telling her of the fine houses he had decorated, of the affable manners of the aristocracy, and of the proper mode of addressing them. He loved the glitter of a coronet on a brougham door, and knew, after a passing glance at the balls and strawberry leaves, if the man inside the brougham was a marquis or an earl. He had met such men, he told Gladys, and had even sat at meat with them. But they were merely acquaintances, not real friends. He told her also of the rich but untitled men who were his real friends—Grove, the printer, Malcomson, the banker, and so on.

"Gladys, they have treated me rather cruelly, but I don't bear malice. I don't cut them when I see them. It's the way of the world. When you're down, they think you can't get up again. But I'm not done—Young still, only fifty-five. I can rise again to what I was—and higher. All I have wanted was just a helping hand—a stroke of luck. And it will come. I'm a Napoleon in one way: I believe in my star." . . .

And Gladys wished that she might one day be a rich woman and help Papa; or, dreaming, conferred immediate honors on him, placed him in a marquis's brougham and sent him driving home to a newly-decorated palace. But waking from such dreams brought a new sadness. Another law of life—We cannot aid those we love.

Certainly Mr. Copland did not cut his old rich friends. Forgetting his daughter near the Achilles statue, he was bowing obsequiously to people in an open carriage—going to them with bare head,—thrusting his hand upon them. They were Mr. and Mrs. Malcomson, in their barouche, with their daughter Irene. Gladys very dimly remembered Irene as an apple-cheeked nursery guest at St. John's Wood. Now she was slim, elegant, languid, beautifully dressed; like a grown-up young lady, except that her bronze hair was tied

with ribbon behind her long neck. Gladys shyly hung back, but was presently brought forward to talk to Irene.

"Your daughter must come and see Irene," said kind Mrs. Malcomson.

All the way home to Chelsea papa was insisting that Gladys must "follow this up"; take advantage of so handsome an invitation; and cleave tightly to the childhood's friend so fortunately recovered. Henceforth, Gladys went now and then to spend a day at the Malcomsons' grand mansion in the Bayswater Road. It was nice to have a girl-friend who had known one all one's life; but Irene was a queer incomprehensible companion and said things that first pleased, then perplexed, then really troubled one.

"You are pretty, you know, Gladys. Don't you know it —don't people tell you so? Hasn't anybody fallen in love with you yet? Don't men stare at you in the streets? They do at me—If you weren't dressed so dowdily, men would notice you, I'm sure."

Gladys was just seventeen when there occurred the dreadful never-to-be-forgotten episode of the nobleman and the American desk. Copland could talk of nothing but his new client —a real lord, dropped from the clouds, examining the second-hand bureaux, and commissioning Copland to find for him and buy for him a large American office desk. Papa was delighted to enter upon relations with so aristocratic a client; he wrote to the client at least once a day, addressing him with scrupulous correctness—The Right Honorable The Viscount Collingbourne, 71 Trafalgar Mansions, Battersea Park; and within a week he had carried out the commission and procured exactly the desk described and desired by the client. All then seemed happiness and honest pride. Papa, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, said, "This may lead to much opening out before me."

But then, almost at once, Schiller dolefully whispered to Gladys that Papa had been bowled out in sharp, fatally too sharp, practice. Papa, it seemed, muddling the roles of principal and client, had bought the desk for himself and sold it again to the nobleman at a largely increased price; and

the nobleman contended that the desk should have been bought by Copland in the character of agent only. Copland's legitimate reward should have been agent's commission, not dealer's profit. The transaction undoubtedly appeared tricky in nature.

It was pitiful to see the face of Papa now. The fresh color had gone; it looked wrinkled and flabby and grey. His hands shook as he stood in the back room when the shop was closed for the evening, and he coughed and kept opening and shutting his mouth, as if it was very dry and his throat was sore.

"Gladys," he said in a low, faltering voice, "Make me a cup of the strongest tea—and don't let me be disturbed."

Then, fortified by the tea, he sat down and wrote an inordinately long letter. "My lord Viscount, I appeal to your courtesy and consideration," etc. etc. After finishing the letter, he carried it upstairs and read it to his sick wife. Mrs. Copland shed tears.

"It—it would melt a heart of stone. What I always said of you, Alf—No one can resist you with a pen in your hand."

Mr. Copland, greatly cheered, went out in his slippers to post the letter; came back, and drank weak whisky and water composedly.

But, quite unmelting and furiously resisting, this terrible nobleman came to the shop next day and was brutal as ever. He bullied, badgered, and baited the miserable shopkeeper; he snapped at and terrified Schiller; he almost scared Gladys into a fainting fit by his querulously raging gestures, his fierce shock beard, the hard lines of his mouth, and his stabbing voice.

"Let us compromise the dispute," said Mr. Copland again and again. "I am willing to write a cheque for a hospital. I own I went too far. I have been much upset lately—unable to remember instructions—getting mixed in different orders. But I can't make a fairer proposal. You keep the desk at your own figure, and I give five pounds—ten pounds—to any hospital you care to name."

"That means, in plain English, you admit you are a rogue —and sue to me for mercy—not to punish you for your roguery."

"Oh, no, I don't admit that."

"You are a rogue, sir."

"No, he is *not,*" sobbed Gladys. "You are cruel and wicked to say so." In a frenzy of grief and love and fear, she prayed to the bullying stranger for courtesy and consideration. Father intended no harm—never, never in his life had wished to do harm to anyone.

"I accept your offer," said the nobleman at last, "because I'm too busy to be bothered. I am a bad citizen in shielding you from the consequences of your act," and he laughed. "However, I dare say it won't be long before you'll begin again; and then perhaps some good citizen, with more leisure than I have, will lay you by the heels." And he dictated his cruel terms: five pounds each to two charities, and formal receipt for the patent American desk; the money to be paid over in forty-eight hours.

"I'll raise the money somehow," said Copland when the nobleman had gone; and he kissed his sobbing daughter. "Don't cry. Forget it, Gladys. Let's forget. I can't trust myself to say what I think of him—But my own fault! I had put myself in the wrong—*technically.*"

When his wife died, Copland *did* the funeral as a commission job with Standish of Sloane Street. In these sad rites his dual character was unassailable: he could be principal and agent at once without impropriety. His grief was real and very intense; and yet perhaps, during this hour of pain, he found some slight palliative in the necessary business arrangements. Tears streamed down his cheeks; and yet he kept an attentive eye on Standish's men, the drivers of hearse and coach, and the four black horses. He felt torn by genuine sorrow, and yet was pleased to think that everything went off without a hitch.

Very soon after this dark day, Schiller deserted them to seek fortune in Canada. They did not know that he was

going until he had sailed. Of the home-circle, breached and breached again, only a short arc remained: father and daughter alone were left in house and shop.

Slowly the years dragged away. The very poorest times for the shop—no customers. Copland, getting shabbier and shabbier, would stand on the threshold or outside the shop, yarning with anyone who consented to talk and listen. It was a chance acquaintance of the street who eventually introduced money to the business. One day he brought a rather blowzy widow, who invested or lent two hundred and fifty pounds, and was forthwith appointed manageress. Copland was revivified by the windfall. He and Mrs. Pascall got on wonderfully well together; and perhaps she put a little more of her savings into the business, and then a little more still.

"I can truly say"—and Mr. Copland said it impressively—"that no unkind words have ever yet passed between me and Mrs. Pascall."

Vaguely Gladys surmised that many kind words passed between them. Mrs. Pascall was good and considerate; but Gladys regarded her as Fate personified—an ugly fate.

Mrs. Pascall after a few months came to live with them, and brought in her train, an old servant as maid or chaperon. Meanwhile, Mr. Lowry—the fat and grey choirmaster of the neighboring church of St. Judith—was finding occasional work for Gladys. He put her in the way of obtaining payment for morning lessons—"German and English literature, and French only preliminary." Moreover, he secured for her some modest engagements to sing ballads at smoking concerts, public and private parties.

She was twenty-two, twenty-three, and she knew now that when the future smiles at youth and innocence, its smile is sphinx-like but meaningless, and most cruel because behind it there is blank indifference. As she walked about the streets, she could see the cruelty of the world. It was as if curtains had lifted, showing her misery on all sides—endless toil, joyless strife, hopeless pain. And how impious to ask for much when so many have nothing!

Here she became firm as to hopes and dreams. No sane

thinking creature in these days should long for luxury, wealth, pomp, and praise. Shelter, food, love—it is wicked, foolish, base to ask for more. Thus early she reached this root idea; and she never afterwards lost hold of it.

But suddenly she forgot Mrs. Pascall and the ugliness of Fate. A young man had been so kind as to fall in love with her, and to implore her to marry him. Young Mr. Lionel Dawes was a friend or acquaintance of Mr. Lowry. He was feeble, selfish, commonplace; but Gladys gave him at once all the attributes that should have been his—strength, beauty, romantically noble ambition. Papa Copland—almost too busy with Mrs. Pascall to hear his daughter's story of love and hope—gave his consent; the solemn engagement was made; and for a time those heavy curtains fell again upon all that is dark and sad.

She hastened to tell her friend Irene Malcomson all about the happy engagement.

"So a man has come into your life," said Irene patronizingly. "But is he a man—a *real* man—not a simpering puppet?"

Gladys said he was almost masculine perfection, and Irene with a patronizing air gave her blessing.

"Bring him to see us, Gladys. I should like to see him and judge him. What is he by trade or profession?"

"Something in the city."

"And are you in love with him?"

"Oh, yes. How can you ask?"

"In love with *him*—the man, Lionel?" said Irene persistently. "Not merely in love, with love itself—the idea of being married to anybody decent—with a home of your own? Because that is the great point."

And then Irene gave some very queer advice.

Gladys did not bring her love to be critically examined by the rich Malcomsons of the Bayswater Road. She was happy in her dream, and needed no expert opinions on the rational basis of her joy. For a long time she had dreaded the range and audacity of Irene's glib tongue: Irene was clever, erudite,

and trained in speculative thought, but, dealing with many subjects, she gave one a sense of confusion and of trouble.

For many months the dream lasted. The engagement was firmly established for good or ill. The young couple went about together, testing the charm of the companionship that, if all promised well, should never produce a minute's weariness. Sometimes perhaps Gladys, mentally leaning on her companion, had a swift consciousness that it would be dangerous to lean heavily. A qualm seized her, as when one unexpectedly finds blank space where one looked for substance and weight.

It was Mr. Lowry, quite ignorant of the engagement, who broke her dream with a startling voice.

"You know that young Dawes," said Mr. Lowry contemptuously. "Well, I always thought he was a rotter. He is going to marry a woman old enough to be his mother—for her money."

Gladys, startled, would not believe. Mr. Dawes, as she knew, or thought she knew, would marry someone young enough to be his sister—with no money. But Mr. Lowry was not shaken by her incredulity.

"Oh, yes. It's all right—no doubt of it. The announcement was in the *Morning Post*. Mrs. Reuben Vincent! She's a widow with three or four thousand a year—a Jewess—and they're to be married immediately. He must be a young rotter to do a thing like that at his age."

How could one believe in the possibility of such wickedness and deceit? And yet the thing was true.

Next Saturday Mr. Lionel Dawes took her down to Hampton Court for a jolly afternoon, and explained all his doubts and difficulties.

He loved her—yes, as much as ever; but money-making was an arduous art; he doubted if he possessed any real ability in that direction. He did not care two straws for Mrs. Reuben Vincent, but she had three thousand a year. He knew what was best for him, and really it seemed that it might be best for Gladys, too, if he set her free.

As he talked, he sighed, held her hand and patted it gently;

and she, listening, slowly measured the extent of her disappointment. Not love-sickness—not wounded love, but wounded pride made her suffer pain and torment. She had wasted all her hope and faith on this feeble cowardly creature. Life itself disappointed her, as she realized her own stupidity. Here was illimitable vacuousness—nothing in the man: not a man at all, a deceiving unworthy puppet.

"Gladys, if you tell me to, I'll chuck it even now—even if it breaks her heart. If I must break a heart, I'd sooner break hers than yours any day of the week. . . . But, O Gladys, I don't mind saying it would be a relief if I could persuade you that in the long run it will be the best thing for you, as well as the best thing for me."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Gladys, I was afraid. I really was afraid to tell you."

After his long explanations he seemed quite exhausted. When they came to Hampton Court, he said he was too tired to go through the rooms or to wander about the gardens. He could only sit on a bench, look at her ruefully, and heave deep sighs. At tea he ate enormously, sighing as he asked the waiter for more bread and butter, and more jam.

"It is so dreadful, Gladys, to think that this is our last outing together."

After tea he smoked enormously—all the way back in the train.

"Do you mind going in a smoking carriage? We can get one to ourselves—and I feel that I must smoke, to steady my nerves. You don't know how all this agitation upsets me."

Without real design, on this Saturday afternoon, he did for her the kindest thing he could: he showed her how little intrinsic value lay in that which she was losing. And yet he left her at last weighed down by a sense of intolerable disappointment.

"Gladys"—and he looked at her anxiously, and sighed—"you won't attempt anything foolish?"

She laughed bitterly.

"Do you mean, come to the church and make a scene? No, I won't do that. Don't be afraid."

"Nor anything else—more foolish? Gladys—I *am* afraid —dreadfully afraid."

"Do you mean, commit suicide because you have jilted me?" and she laughed again. "No, I promise you I won't do that either."

"What will you do?"

"Get over it in time," said Gladys bitterly.

That was the end of her interçourse with Mr. Lionel Dawes.

Her father had gone from her utterly. He needed her no more; in house or shop she had no real place; if he wished to walk about the great town, and chatter while he walked, he asked Mrs. Pascall to accompany him.

Not wanted by anybody; one after another, all gone from her—Gladys, before her twenty-third birthday, had discovered the last cruel law. We dread that we shall lose those we love in death, and we lose them in life. The knowledge of this most cruel law completed her disillusionment.

IV

IN the pleasant June weather Seymour Charlton surrendered himself entirely to the absorbing interest of his new friendship. His friend would meet him whenever he summoned her; she would suit herself to his humor, be grave or gay as he looked at her gloomily or laughingly; never did an idle man have a kinder or more docile companion to help him while away the dull hours. Only when he asked her to come again to Mr. Marlow's silent retreat, was she persistently rebellious and disobedient.

"No. I can't do that. Don't spoil everything by asking me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't like it—Be as you are now. Let us go on just as we are—Please."

She was very sweet always, but in this one matter she resisted him; and he, content to let things drift, submitted to her wish.

The first strong charm of the friendship sprang from the ease with which they could talk to each other. When they met, there was no tentative effort: they could pick up the endless thread of their talk as if they had not been interrupted.

The talk was often of life and their thoughts of life; and, hearing her, he found again and again a complete response to his own feelings. This girl seemed to have worked out, for herself, intuitively, all that he had tardily discovered by painful experience. She too had been amazed by the universal aimlessness: everyone struggling without purpose; people moving as in a troubled dream; on all sides the failure to achieve any rational end. When she spoke of the cruel laws of life—her generalizations, marking stages of sad enlightenment,—her words seemed an echo of his thought.

And you cannot help those you love. As she recited this law, he could catch the deep love-note in her voice, and understand how much she had loved her furniture-selling father and the queer brothers and sister. She had told him almost everything about herself and her family; and already he knew how Alfred and Pelham were prospering in Brisbane, and how Schiller was having a rough time in Canada.

"Schiller is the naughty brother who doesn't write home?"

"Yes. I am very anxious about Schiller."

"Why was he called Schiller?"

"Because Father is so fond of Schiller's poetry."

"And are you fond of it?"

"Yes, I love all poetry—nearly all."

Then they talked of her favorite poets, and he told her that once he had himself in a very modest way tried to be a poet. This was a thing that he could not have talked of to any ordinary friend: to save his life he could not for any of his well-meaning amiable cousins have quoted his own verses. Yet he did it now quite naturally, without false shame or apology, because this girl asked him to do it. She was different from all other girls: she was so candid and unaffected that one lost self-consciousness.

She praised his jingling lines, and told him to continue verse-making.

"Why don't you write the end of Christabel? Write like Coleridge. Do."

"That's a large order. Perhaps I couldn't write like Coleridge if I tried."

"You don't know if you could do it—till you try. . . . But I suppose you ought to write like yourself, and not imitate anybody. . . . I am sure that, having such a gift, you ought to write and write and write as hard as you can."

"I'll write songs, if you will sing them. Then, however bad the verse, the song will seem beautiful. You will put new meaning into it—as you did into the song that made me your slave."

"You are not my slave."

"Well, then, your humble follower—your shadow while the sun shines. That means as long as you smile at me."

She had praised him as poet, and he praised her as musician. But each refused to acknowledge merit. She seemed to him totally free from conceit, and her frank directness when discussing her powers rendered argument impossible.

She described the kindness of Mr. Lowry, the singing in big City halls, the fees that she could never have earned but for the introductions and chaperonage of the good choirmaster.

"I can't sing at all, really—I don't even produce my voice correctly; and if I knew everything about voice production —my voice itself would not be worth producing."

"Who said that?"

"Mr. Lowry. I wanted to be an opera singer and earn heaps of money—but of course the expensive education was impossible—and I used to be sorry. I was always thinking of it. At last, one day, I asked Mr. Lowry if he would give me three real lessons for a sovereign. He insisted on giving them without any payment—and then I asked him if I would have a chance, supposing I went on with a regular training. I felt sure he would say yes—but he said No. Not the least chance! My voice was just natural—no good really. If you trained it, it would get thinner and thinner, and disappear or become reedy and unpleasing."

"I can't believe that."

"Oh, Mr. Lowry *knows*. He is wonderful about music."

"Gladys, tell me this. Was Mr. Lowry in love with you?"

"Oh, no."

"Never made love to you?"

"No. Mr. Lowry has always been nice to me. I was afraid of him at first—because the other girls said he was horrid sometimes, squeezing their hands, holding his head on one side, and paying them absurd compliments. But he was always nice to me."

"Everybody must be nice to you—You make them nice, if by disposition they are nasty."

He liked to think—whether it was true or not—that her innocence had been an armor to protect her from base attacks, that the music master had recognized the difference between this pupil and all other pupils.

"Old men," she said reflectively, "are so dreadful when they forget their age."

"But we like to forget our age, Gladys."

"What do you mean? You are not old. You'll never be old. People who write poetry never grow old."

"What pretty things you say, Gladys."

Now and then in imagination he placed her by the side of girls belonging to his own world, and carefully compared her with some much-admired Lady Jane or Lady Edith. And it seemed to him that all concerning this girl was real and sound, that she was composed of essentials, with nonsense. pretence, and simulation stripped away; and that the other was wrapped round with shams, tricks, and make-belief. Inwardly and outwardly, she was gracious and graceful; and she was herself: whereas the other was radiant, beautiful, or fascinating, only as a projection of extraneous light and color—a glittering picture thrown upon a thought-screen, not a substantial palpable object that the spectator may walk round and examine at close range. This was a fancy to which he returned again and again. It was the message in the girl's song—the message that flowed from her in her steady

trustful eyes, her clear firm voice, her sympathetic silences. Only essentials count—then be done with all trifles.

Thinking of those costly outer sheaths in which the Lady Marys of the world are laced and swathed by Paris clothes-artists, he asked her questions about her dress. She was poor—very poor,—and yet it seemed that she was truly as well dressed as a Lady Mary.

"How much did it all cost, Gladys?"

She laughed, and answered his questions with a scrupulous exactness.

The pretty black hat with the pink roses had cost eighteen shillings, and that was the largest item of expenditure. The black blouse with its white spots and lace collar cost nine shillings; the long gauze thing round her neck cost three shillings, the black skirt twelve shillings; the black shoes and the square buckles cost ten shillings and sixpence.

"And it is all fashionable—the right thing—not last year's style?"

"Oh, no," said Gladys. "I am quite up to date."

They were sitting near the water in Kensington Gardens; the sunlight sparkled gaily on the bridge, and the white houses that showed here and there above the green foliage of the trees; children were playing on the grass in the sunlight, and nursemaids chattered in the shade beneath the trees; Lady Marys with their dogs walked by in simple morning costumes that no doubt cost twenty guineas at least. Yet no Lady Mary of them all was in essentials better or more prettily dressed than Gladys.

He was never tired of asking her questions, and of studying her face while she gave her ready, truthful answers. When she paused or hesitated, it was because she sought words to give the truth exactly, not because she searched for words to hide it.

"Gladys, tell me again what you thought of me that first night."

"I have told you so often."

"I would like to hear it again. You hated me for bothering you."

"No. I didn't understand you. You spoke so strangely. I was very tired—and I was unhappy; and I wished you would leave me. But then, all at once, I believed that you were in earnest—that you were really unhappy too. And then I was glad—and I longed to be with you again, because you said that seeing me would do you good."

"It has done me good. It has cheered me—changed me. I don't know myself. I am another man. . . . But you haven't told me yet the real cause of your unhappiness."

"No, I can't tell you that."

"A secret?"

"Yes. That is a secret."

Truth shone from her; she would not lie. When she could not answer a question, she gave her frank refusal—no prevarications, no vague phrases.

Once, pricked for a moment by a jealous doubt, and then taking a selfish joy in the test of his power over her, he tried to force a reply.

"What was that secret you would not tell me? Tell me now."

"Oh, I can't—I don't want to. Please don't ask me about it."

"But I must ask you. I want to know everything—Tell me."

She looked at him pleadingly, and shook her head. Then, persisting in his demand, he could see her struggle to maintain the refusal.

"Don't be unkind."

"Tell me."

He could see the struggle in her eyes. A faint flush came and went; her lips were open; her eyebrows were drawn together; her breath quickened. For a moment deep instincts of the selfish male gave him an exultant joy. He had power over her—to use if he ever cared to use it. She was fighting him for freedom of will.

"No, I won't tell you. I think you are very unkind."

The struggle was over, and she had won. Selfishly testing his power, he had soon found its limits.

"Gladys, don't think me unkind. Of course I have no

right to ask to know anything you don't want to tell me. . . . Let us talk about something else."

And as they talked on, it was she who asked questions and it was he who had to answer.

Exchanging confidence for confidence, he had given her descriptive sketches of his people—the sick old man, his father; the kind old sister; the troublesome elder brother who had grievously upset the family.

She never failed to inquire after the health of Mr. Charlton and Miss Charlton, and often expressed a hope that the brother had not occasioned any fresh annoyance.

"Miss Charlton is much older than you?"

"Yes," he said, "my sister must be fifty. I am only thirty-five—a mere boy. She is my half-sister, you know."

There was a slight awkwardness in the fact that Gladys, jumping to quite natural but erroneous conclusions, had robbed the family, at one swoop, of all its rank and titles.

Somehow he could not enlighten her on such an unessential matter. The error was not of the smallest consequence, and his tongue faltered, embarrassment held him, when he tried to put it right. Explanation seemed ridiculous and pompous, however one should attempt to explain. She would find out for herself.

Thus it happened that the weeks slipped by, and Gladys remained ignorant of all the glories of this noble family. Andover House, throwing an oppressive shadow, could not weigh down her spirits with burdensome pomp and prison-like gloom. She did not even know its famous name. Her friend wrote to her from 24 Carolus Street, W—using the note-paper served out by Mr. Latham for upper rooms, offices, free lodgers, servants, etc.

Certainly then, if the girl was giving away her heart, she was giving it to the man himself, and not to the house, the family, the honored historic title.

Though they met so frequently, she wrote to him often. When his letters were brought to his room of a morning, he looked through them eagerly. If there was nothing from

her, blankness and disappointment fell upon him: the post office might have saved itself trouble, might have burned the morning's mail instead of sorting and delivering it. His other letters were not worth reading.

Once, since she had not satisfied him with a new letter, he pleased himself in studying all her old letters. He was careful to put them in order—spreading them out on the table in his room, examining dates on post-marks,—so that he might read them in their proper sequence, and retrace the progress of the days.

"Dear Mr. Charlton." "My dear Mr. Charlton"—"Dear Seymour." . . .

Four, five letters before he had won from her the Christian name.

"Dear Seymour, you see I am doing what you said I was to do—call you Seymour. . . . "

When he came to the first of the letters that began with "Dearest Seymour," the blood seemed to flow in his veins more swiftly, his pulse to beat stronger.

Sitting with the letters spread out before him, he thought of her intently. What was to be the end of the slowly ripening friendship? Every day he was weakening himself, making her more necessary to his comfort and his peace. Really, it was too absurd—at his age. Analyzing his feeling, he recognized the absurdity of their relations. All this might have occurred seventeen years ago, when he was eighteen—love as understood by school boys and school girls—an innocent childish intrigue that, with appropriate finale, should lead to sharp reprimand, and rupture by parents and guardians. It was as if, achieving the impossible, she had obliterated all his past experience, his knowledge of women and of the world, and had made him young again—and very foolish.

He smiled as he thought of it: all the power seemed hers, not his.

Now, this morning, he thrilled with pleasure, because a letter had come from her and she called him her dearest, and because she showed him that, after all, he had considerable power with her.

"My dearest Seymour, when I see you again, I will tell you that secret. After I left you to-day I was miserable. It was silly not to tell you at once. I can't bear that you should think badly of me. You must not think that it was something dreadful of which I was ashamed. It is nothing. Meet me soon, and let me tell you. . . . "

The secret was the story of her broken engagement. At their next meeting she recounted the whole of her adventure with the worthless Lionel.

"How long ago was that?"

"Not very long," she said humbly. "Are you angry with me?"

"No, of course not—But why did it make you so unhappy? Were you still fond of him?"

"No. I am sure now I was never really fond of him. I hate to remember that I was willing to marry him."

"You intended to marry him?"

"Yes. Don't be angry with me."

"I am not angry."

"You are—though you say you are not. You think I disgraced myself by loving such a man. Seymour, I didn't love him—It was never love."

"Then why should you pine for him?"

"I didn't pine. I was unhappy because I felt that no one wanted me, that no one would ever care for me. . . . Seymour!"

He wished that he had not penetrated the secret. It was infinitely distasteful to him to think of her as linked to this other man—some common fellow who leapt from an office stool to clasp her with authorized embraces. And this was not years ago. Quite recently she was the docile companion of this other man—responding to his moods, smiling when he was gay, turning sad and thoughtful when he frowned. He himself, had been welcomed as a stop-gap: he should thank the deceitful and weary clerk for the chance of obtaining her favor.

For a few minutes he could not pardon the sin of thinking of other men before she knew of his existence. But then more generous considerations prevailed, and he magnanimously forgave her.

"Never mind, Gladys. You know now that there is someone who cares for you."

"You *do* care for me still—as much as before I told you?"

"Yes. I care for you so much that I don't dare to think how much I care for you."

"Seymour!"

First there had been interest, tinged of course with a little desire; then the longing for this one companion had firmly established itself—to change into passionate longing for a closer bond each time that he held her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. Then, by her sudden revolt against such caresses and her avoidance of opportunity for their renewal, she had compelled him to another and more placid emotion.

The intermittent throb of desire was ceasing altogether: the affection that slowly rises from sympathy and custom was gradually controlling him. Already it had come to this:—a quite passionless pleasure in her company, an assured sense of ease when with her, restlessness and discontent when away from her.

They spent long afternoons out of London—at Richmond, Windsor, or Staines; they came back and dined at some cheap little restaurant, rode on omnibuses through the lamplit streets, or sat in the upper circle of some crowded theatre to enjoy the latest masterpiece of modern drama. She loved the play; she loved all the treats he gave her; but she feared that he would ruin himself by these continued extravagances.

"Seymour, I make you spend so much money—and you owned that you are not rich. Don't let us do anything expensive to-day."

He thought of the women he had loved in the past, and of the normal charges of escort duty. One gallant day's attendance on a lady of his world cost as much as a month's entertainment of Gladys.

Looking down at his old world from the lofty upper boxes, he remembered how, as a child taken to the theatre, he had been shown by another child the delightful result obtained from applying one's eye to the wrong end of an opera glass.

With reversed glass one found the audience diminished to a ludicrous insignificance: one looked down into the stalls, and saw rows and rows of foolish little people where a moment before had been the proudest and most consequential grown-ups—comic little dwarfs, utterly unconscious that the turn of a glass had deprived them of size, weight, and dignity. It seemed to him now that Gladys in herself had the power of the inverted glass: she made so many things once important appear trivial and contemptible.

Less high-placed and with more room for his knees, Seymour on the top of an omnibus considered his old world with an equal severity. The fashionable dinner hour was sounding; every cab contained a solitary man in dress clothes; broughams and motors, holding stupid married couples or artificially vivacious detached wives, whirled about each street corner. All his world was hurrying without appetite to its costly meal—to the vulgarity of public eating-houses, or the solemn and brain-destroying dullness of private banquets. Yet these women and men must in thought-glimpses see the prodigal iniquity of their wasted hours.

From the omnibus, as from the upper boxes, the world of fashion and routine seemed to him sometimes unreal as a foolish dream, unsubstantial as the visions of a madman.

It was the girl showing him essentials, as the child had shown him the use of the upturned lens. The beauty of summer nights is real, and there is nothing to pay for it. Sympathy and kindness are real, and millionaires may, and do, run short of them. Love is real, and the best of it cannot be purchased, even if you have limitless credit to draw upon. In the past, he would have mentally recoiled from the intrusion of such obvious ideas,—as even the most minor of poets, would have been ashamed to shelter them a moment without giving them a new twist. But now their oldness and their triteness caused him no shame. Gladys was teaching him the value of simple and unpoetic directness.

One night when he had brought her home to the shabby King's Road, he would not allow her to leave him. He felt

that he could not part with her, could not stand by and watch the dingy little door shut her away from him for so many hours.

He made her walk with him on the Chelsea embankment, and, in spite of entreaties, selfishly detained her.

"Seymour, take me back now. Father will be angry."

"Your father is sleeping peacefully."

"Yes, but he will hear how late I came in—The servant is sitting up for me. They'll ask questions to-morrow—and then perhaps I shan't be able to meet you any more."

But he could not part with her. Midway between lamps, in the shadow of the plane trees, he held her fast, kissing her and murmuring his love. Before to-night, he had never said he loved her: he was fond of her, cared for her, but now the word was love.

"No, you can't love me, or you wouldn't try to make me do what I don't want—Let me go, please. Don't be unkind to me, Seymour," and to his surprise she burst into tears.

"Gladys, my dear girl, what is it? We'll go now."

But she sobbed most piteously, and would not be consoled.

They walked back silently, when the girl had dried her eyes. Somehow he had nothing more to say to her. The friendship had reached a point when one must think seriously of how to carry it on—or to wind it up.

V

SHE lay awake at night thinking of him; when she slept, she dreamed of him. How could she retain safe ward of her beating heart when such a man seemed to want to take it from her? All her thoughts till now, her yearnings and disappointments, had been a long preparation to make her love him. But she might not talk of him. The need to speak her thoughts was almost unconquerable.

"What's the matter with you?" asked blowzy Mrs. Pascall. "You haven't touched your breakfast."

Love was the matter with her, and her difficulty was to avoid blurting out to Mrs. Pascall a full and candid confession. She wished to say to Mrs. Pascall—to anyone who would kindly listen: "It's not a delusion this time. It is the true thing. You must know that he has realized all my vague ideals. Everything about him draws me, delights me—his age—his strong mind—his quick perception—everything. And he is so nice to everybody—waiters, porters, programme-sellers."

Like Papa writing one of his long letters, if she had once started, she could not have stopped herself.

But Mrs. Pascall and Papa never let her start. Mrs. Pascall after breakfast was busily occupied in brushing Papa's top hat, and warming his best frock coat at the kitchen fire in order to get out its obdurate creases. Mr. Copland was going to pay a visit, and he desired to appear as prosperous as might be possible. He looked at Gladys with a vacant eye, and spoke boastfully, to himself rather than to her.

"Very pressing appointment—a Knightsbridge mansion. Sir Gregory Stuart has asked for a business interview—at his own house. I have been in correspondence with Sir Gregory, but have not yet had an opportunity to make his acquaintance. I fancy our interview will prove to be a *conference*—I expect to find other important people there——"

When he had gone, Mrs. Pascall asked a question of Gladys.

"Has Mr. Copland said anything to you about some scheme he is getting on foot?"

"No."

"No more he has to me," said Mrs. Pascall thoughtfully. "I don't think your father ought to keep things back from me. But he does. I've the right to know what he's up to—after all I've done for him. I don't think it's fair to act as if I was nobody."

Mrs. Pascall had anxieties of her own, and perhaps, for her part, also, would have been glad to pour them out to a sympathetic ear. But Gladys could not encourage her. Neither could listen, or even comprehend that the other was craving to talk.

Irene Malcomson was the only person available to Gladys

as occasional listener. In her dire necessity to talk about her love, Gladys went now and then to Irene.

Directly one crossed the threshold of the Malcomsons' fine house in the Bayswater Road, one felt a heavy atmosphere. Malcomson himself was a large gloomy man, who found a sort of sombre masterful patriarchal pleasure in his home life. He was devoted to his fat and placid wife, and yet he bullied her persistently. He was fond and proud of his children, but he could not make himself their friend: he always reminded them that he was the absolute ruler as well as the generous guardian.

With his partners, the Dulakes, he was a dealer in money: a merchant who bought and sold money on credit, just as other merchants buy and sell bales of wool or iron goods. The firm called themselves bankers, and you might often see their name as English agents to certain loan-issuing South American governments. People spoke of a distant Jewish strain,—but it was only a suspicion. Mr. Malcomson never entered a synagogue; his wife was a Christian; not more than half his friends were Jews.

He sent his three sons to Harrow or Rugby, and Cambridge; and then gave them desks in the city office. Two elder daughters had married and received handsome dowers; but Irene, unaccountably, remained on hand. Too much had been done for Irene: in spite of himself Mr. Malcomson had pampered and spoiled her. Bullying her became more and more difficult; and now she could stand up to the patriarchal father and defy him. She laughed contemptuously when he adopted his overbearing manner, and when Mrs. Malcomson trembled before the master's wrath. Mr. Malcomson would have been glad—would have put up big money—to see Irene happily wed.

She should have been a most attractive girl, and yet somehow she failed to attract. She was tall and willowy—with beautiful bronze hair, dead white skin, eyes of a dark violet, a thin nose, wide sensitive nostrils, red lips: really a handsome girl—and yet she did not anyhow get married.

"Do bring the young men here," Mrs. Malcomson used to say piteously to her sons. "She looks down on your father's

friends—and besides, they are all old. Do ask the young men to dinner." Mrs. Malcomson offered Irene—almost in set terms—to every young man she knew.

But Irene herself frightened the young men. She allured them at first, but then—as poor Mrs. Malcomson saw plainly—she instilled fear into them.

Gladys Copland, when calling upon her friend, was always conducted to the third floor and received in the pretty boudoir that adjoined Irene's bedroom. And up here Miss Irene used to pour out hysterical vaporings, with garbled French philosophy, and such wilfully horrid scientific theorems that sometimes one really could not listen to her.

Her advice on serious matters rarely failed to shock and distress; and when one protested and reproached her, she burst into emotional tantrums, let loose a tempest of violent self-pity. You were to be sorry for her, and not to chide her.

Thus in the early days of the Dawes engagement, she shocked and agitated Gladys by the wildness of her counsel. It was when Gladys had reported that it might be a long time before her Lionel could afford to marry.

"Don't wait," said Irene with sudden intensity. "Tell him to scrape together what money he can—and go and live with him now—till you have spent the money. Don't wait and waste your life."

"Irene, how *can* you say such things? I know you don't really mean them, but——"

"But I do mean them. It is what I shall do myself if I ever meet a man worth it. I haven't met him yet." And Irene threw away her cigarette, like a caged tigress walked up and down the room, gave a theatrical display of furious discontent, and noisily inveighed against her "smuggish middle-class" surroundings, and "the beastly humbug" of Bayswater moral laws.

"I'd do it, if only to make all these fools squirm." Then she flung herself into one of the deep chairs, writhed, clenched her fists, and wept. "Oh, I don't know what I want—I hate men. It's a physical repulsion. But if a man would take me

in spite of myself—carry me out of this prison house of life—out of *myself*—I'd be his slave. If he beat me, I'd kiss his hand—I'd lie at his feet and let him trample on me. . . . I think I shall end in an asylum for the insane. No one understands me. Feel my hands—cold as ice. Feel my forehead—hot as fire—hell fire—the hell of one's own thoughts, that one can't escape from. . . ."

Gladys shocked and frightened by some such outburst, hoped it was mostly acting. Irene had heard all this at some stage-society play, or read it in a novel denounced by the circulating library. It was not, it could not be, the un-imitative sincere emotion of Irene.

And this supposition seemed to be verified by the tone and manner of Irene next time one saw her.

But reflecting after very many visits Gladys came to the definite conclusion—reached also by all the young men—that there was something radically wrong with Irene. She was from old association fond of Irene. In a careless way Irene had for years been kind to her. She was sorry for Irene. But instinct, even without reasoning, told one that Irene could not be helped, guided, or impeded: Irene would fatally solve her world-enigma all by herself.

A dangerous friend, perhaps, to trust in large things or small things. But she was Gladys's only real girl-friend. Gladys could not abandon her.

She was excited when Gladys came to her with a second love-story.

"What! Another man on the scene *already?* How on earth do you manage it?" and her voice became intense, and she honored Gladys with a penetrating scrutiny. "I wonder! . . . A gentleman?"

"Oh, yes."

But she required satisfaction on this point. She was doubtful if Gladys could competently judge.

"I mean, a real gentleman—all through—not just clothes and patent leather boots. I don't call my poor brothers or the people who come here real gentlemen. They're not even good imitations."

Much less of course could Irene call Mr Copland and the brothers of Gladys gentlemen. Gladys, however, was firm. This was an ideal gentleman.

"Seymour Charlton! It's a pretty name. I don't know it; but it sounds all right."

"I think," said Gladys, "it's the nicest name I ever heard."

"You'd think that, whatever the name was—as long as he makes love to you." And Irene began a sharp fire of questions. She was so intensely interested that she could not permit Gladys to tell her own story.

"My dear girl, you're so soft. Are you sure he isn't a little worm like that other one?"

"No—no."

"Is he a *man?*"

"He is a king of men."

"Is he rich?"

"No, he is poor."

"Where does he live?"

"In Carolus Street."

"Mayfair?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"That's a good street then. What sort of a house?"

"I don't know. I have never been there."

"Haven't you had the curiosity to go and see it? Of course it's the smartest neighborhood. But I believe there are some pokey little houses in Carolus Street—I think it's in Carolus Street that there are two or three funny old shops. I expect he lives in rooms over one of them."

"No, it is a private house. He lives with his father, who is a great invalid—and with old Miss Charlton, his step-sister."

"What does he do? Trade—profession?"

"He was a soldier—but he left the army a long time ago."

"What was his regiment?"

"I think it was one of the Guards regiments."

"The *Guards!* Surely not? He could never have been in the Guards if he hadn't plenty of money."

"He told me he had more money then—but he found he was too poor to stay in his regiment."

"No guardsmen ever come *here,* so I can't find out for you if it's true—or whether he tells you fairy tales to amuse you."

Gladys protested indignantly.

"Oh, yes, you said all that before—about the other—the worm. You said *he* would never deceive you."

"Don't compare them for an instant."

"All right. What is the new one like to look at?"

To answer this question at leisure was what Gladys had come for. When at last Irene consented to listen to the witness, instead of firing questions at the witness, she received the fullest and most minute particulars.

"That's right," she said condescendingly. "Go on describing. I want to judge him. I want to make a picture from your words, so that I can imagine he stands before me."

And to this end Gladys certainly gave her an adequate supply of words.

" . . . His eyes are clear—grayish—with spots of darker color in the gray—not green color—slatey blue; and his eye-lashes are dark—and the lower eye-lashes, too. That makes his eyes seem dark—a kind of shadowy darkness in them. But they are not dark, themselves, *really.* It was a surprise to me to find that they were as light as my own. He said our eyes were the same color—and I couldn't believe it. . . ."

"You are very much in love with him—I can see that, if I can't see anything else. You never spoke like this of the worm."

"I worship him." And Gladys, almost bursting with pent-up feeling, was about to trust Irene absolutely—to disclose all her secret deepest thought, her great hope and her great fear—when Irene violently stopped the stream of words.

"Then don't wait—don't let him slip through your fingers;" and for the second time, and with heightened intensity, Irene proffered her baleful advice. "Be happy while you can. Be happy now. Don't look ahead."

Gladys turned away, stared out of the window at the green trees, the riders on the brown tan, the distant water, and the yellow haze of sunlight above the farthest houses.

"*I* should do it," said Irene, "if I had found a man worth loving. I wouldn't wait for orange blossoms and organ music,

and a lot of fools to throw rice at me. I'd go right away with my love, and stay as long as the love lasted——"

Gladys with wet eyes stared at the view of Hyde Park, and did not answer. In thought she was replying. If she had completed her confession, these might have been her words.

"I can't follow such advice, Irene. I'll confess the truth. I meant to. I was so miserable that I thought I would do anything to escape from my loneliness. I meant it when I first agreed to meet him. I thought I'd sacrifice everything to make *him* happy—if he wished it. But since the love came—the real love,—I know that it must be a life-bond, or *nothing.*"

She did not, except in thought reply; and Irene went on with the morbid ugly talk of which she possessed inexhaustible reservoirs.

"We are only young once. You are twenty-three, aren't you? Do you understand what that means? You have only seven more years. I have only five years. It's all over after thirty. . . .

"I *know.*—I see it wherever I look. Women don't make up their minds in time. After thirty they understand. Between then and forty they are desperate—sick, half mad for want of love. I watch them sometimes—the women at our hateful parties—and I laugh at them, but don't pity them. They'd do *anything* to get hold of men now. But it's too late. Love would have kept them young. They have squandered their fortune—youth. Men won't touch them with a barge pole—except the beastly elderly men who like everything rank and stale—high game, strong cheese, dirty old stories—because they are rotten themselves, walking masses of decay, dressed-up corpses grinning and grimacing, pretending to be alive though they ought to have been in lead coffins for years. *Those* are the lovers women get after thirty—and they shut their eyes, hold their breaths, and *take* them, because they can't get any better. The *live* men have passed beyond their reach. . . ."

Irene, with free rein to her morbid fancy, could be rankly disgusting.

Gladys, after this last visit, went away from the Bayswater Road with a burden of troubled thought. She had spoken of her love; but instead of feeling lighter, she felt heavier.

VI

ONE July day it seemed as if the shadow of Andover House, stretching through the afternoon hours, had extended itself as far as Battersea Park and fallen on Gladys—to chill her as she sat in the sunlight with her lover.

They had met as usual on the Chelsea embankment; then had crossed the bridge, and walked along the path by the water until they found a vacant bench. It was pleasant here—with the voices of children sounding musically, gay flowers in trim beds, tugs and barges moving slowly on a full tide and sending sluggish little waves to tap and break against the granite wall, clouds racing high above the sunshine, and a fresh wind coming gustily along the river. A park-keeper, as if half asleep, passed by, and, leaning his arms on the rail of a seat, lazily considered the barges as they crept up to the bridge. At a distance, on the open grass, a bearded man and a little boy were trying to fly a kite; and Gladys, with hands folded in her lap, dreamily watched them.

There was great difficulty in getting the kite to go up and remain up. It rose with each puff of wind, then dived viciously and came down, pecking at the ground like an angry or wounded bird. Then the man made the boy bring it back to him, and they gave it more tail, smoothed its ruffled feathers, lifted its languid head and again asked it to fly. Dreamily watching their efforts while Seymour talked to her, Gladys fancied that the grown-up man was more interested than the little boy in this juvenile sport. Finally, with a new adjustment of tail feathers, the kite flew boldly upward, soared high to catch the sunbeams on its paper breast; the little boy clapped his hands and shouted shrilly; and the bearded man, unreeling his string, ran back, skipped like a goat among the flower beds,

sprang here and there among geraniums and lobelias, until once more the wind failed and the kite faltered, dived, and despite of frenzied haulings, ignominiously fell.

Presently the man, carrying the kite, with the little boy trotting by his side, came up the path towards them. The park-keeper was in close attendance, sustaining with the man a very angry disputation. The park-keeper had seen the man skipping among the flowers, had roused himself from lethargy, and hastened to examine the havoc wrought by this breaker of Park-laws.

"Mind your own business," snapped the man.

"And isn't it my business when I see you trampling over the flowers—without regard to anything but your own games?"

"Go to the devil."

"No, I won't go to the devil for your telling."

"You—you rascal. You impudent blackguard"—and the bearded man, brandishing his disengaged fist, threatened the park-keeper—"If you dare to follow me another yard, I'll knock you down."

"You try it," said the park-keeper. "Just try it—and see;" but he drew back, and came no further.

"Don't you know who I am?" shouted the man.

He had walked on a few paces, and then turned again furiously.

"Yes, I know who you are very well—and I'll report you, and all you've done—and said—and you'll find out your mistake—Lord or no Lord."

But Lord Collingbourne was by no means claiming submission to his rank as a courtesy lord, but to his position as an ex-M.P., member of the L.C.C., a friend of the people, and a famous mob-orator.

Gladys shivered at the sound of the barking, wrathful voice, still snapping out abusive epithets. This was the cruel nobleman who had tormented and threatened her father. She sat with lowered eyes, trembling now from the memory of the old fear, as he came past the bench.

He recognized Seymour, nodded to him, spoke to him; and Seymour got up and walked on with him for a little way.

Lord Collingbourne was without thought for anything beyond his anger and his grievance. His face was livid; he was shaking, out of breath; he stammered and spluttered in his unappeased rage.

"Did you hear him, Seymour? . . . Scoundrel, to want to stop that poor little chap's pleasure. The boy has been ill—and I give him an hour when I can. Where can he play—if he mayn't play here? Poor rat! . . . Yes, Ned, I'll thrash that blackguard within an inch of his life if he ever enterferes with you. But that's enough. Don't look scared. Let go of my coat, and shake hands with the gentleman."

And the poor little frightened chap offered his hand to Seymour.

"I'm your uncle, Ned," said Seymour kindly, "and I'm very glad you are better of the illness. What was it?"

"The whooping cough, sir."

"Don't call me sir, Ned. Call me Uncle Seymour."

The boy looked up in timid wonder, first at the kind stranger, and then at his father.

"Am I to?"

"Of course," said his father. The blood was returning to his face, and his eyes had suddenly softened: evidently he was grateful to Seymour for noticing the boy.

"How do you do, Uncle Seymour?" said Ned shyly. "I hope you are very well, Uncle Seymour."

"I am very well, thank you," said Seymour, smiling, and patting the boy on the shoulder. "Goodbye, Ned—and, look here, I am going to send you a box-kite. *Those* are the kites. I can get your address from Aunt Emily. You know all about your Aunt Emily?"

"Oh, yes. I know about my Aunt Emily. She gives us presents, too."

"Goodbye, Ned. I won't forget."

A forlornness in the child's aspect, as of a small social outcast, had touched Seymour while he talked to this strange little nephew. The boy's clothes were tidy, but shabby—the common cheap clothes of working folk's children.

"Goodbye, Seymour, old chap," said Lord Collingbourne.

The fierce eyes behind the goggles were quite soft and tamed, and his laugh was friendly and genial, as he glanced round. "Go back to your smart lady. I suppose you have brought her into poor-man's-land to escape from all the swells while you whisper your soft nothings into her ear. . . . Come on, Ned, my boy. Uncle Seymour's pretty lady will be huffed, and she'll vanish away like an offended fairy if we keep Uncle Seymour another moment. . . . Goodbye. Good luck," and Lord Collingbourne took his boy by the hand and hurried on.

When Seymour returned to Gladys, she interrogated him anxiously.

"That was Lord Collingbourne, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"I should know his voice anywhere. I heard him speaking that night when I was waiting to sing at the club dinner—and I felt I couldn't sing before him. I didn't see him, but he was there, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was there."

"How do you come to know such a horrible man?"

"What do *you* know of him?"

In a few words she described how, years ago, he had burst upon the King's Road Shop and terrified her by his baiting of Papa.

"Father had done nothing really wrong, I am certain. But somehow he had put himself in the power of Lord Collingbourne, and was helpless to defend himself. Lord Collingbourne was wickedly cruel to him."

"He is my brother," said Seymour. "That is—my half-brother," and he begged oblivion for the harsh behavior of his troublesome relative. Like Lady Emily, he apologized and made excuses for a bad humor that was not inherited in the family blood, but was peculiar to the individual. It was probably caused by weak health. Lord Collingbourne inflicted pain because he had suffered much pain himself. "You know," said Seymour rather guiltily. "I told you all about him—of how he married beneath him and quarrelled with my father. He lives somewhere near here."

"Your brother! That man your brother—I can scarcely believe it possible."

"We are children of the same father, but of different mothers."

"But then your brother is a lord—how can that be? Your father is not a lord."

"Yes, he is."

Then Seymour, feeling unreasonably guilty, made his long deferred explanation to enlighten Gladys. His father was Lord Brentwood, not Mr Charlton. As he looked at Gladys, he was sorry that he had allowed her to remain under any misapprehension. There was great awkwardness in setting these trifling matters straight.

"Why didn't you tell me? Were you so much ashamed of me that you didn't want me to know who you really were?"

"Gladys, what nonsense! You did know who I was."

Her pale cheeks had flushed, and then had become very pale again; her kind eyes were moist with tears; her lips shook as she reproached him.

"You thought, if I knew that you—you were a person of such importance, I'd be a nuisance—worry you—push myself forward when you were among your own people—and disdisgrace you by claiming acquaintance."

Wounded pride and wounded love brought hot tears to her eyes, and broke her voice with a sob.

"Gladys, how can you think such things?" And he implored her not to misjudge him, not to impute unworthy motives where all was clear and open. He had not told her—because really there was nothing to tell. As to his being a person of importance—that was absurd. He was a mere nobody—as all the world knew, and plainly showed him. It was of no consequence that his father happened to be a man of rank; and shyness, stupidity,—anything you like, but not deceit—had prevented him from mentioning the fact. It could make no difference in Gladys's opinion of him.

"No," said Gladys simply, "what hurts me is that you should seem to have thought it would make a difference."

She said no more—sat with folded hands while he con-

tinued his explanation, and her face grew sadder and sadder.

She was realizing for the first time correctly his place in the world, and its remoteness from her place. He was the member of a noble family—full of pride and pomp, rich and powerful of course,—no matter how lightly he spoke of himself. When he had said he was poor, he only meant poor relatively to his high position in the social scheme. Poverty as understood by the King's Road was beyond his comprehension.

They were divided by walls built of tradition and caste prejudice. She shivered in the warm sunlight, as though a cold shadow had fallen. She was thinking of the baselessness of her greatest hopes. She went home heavily thinking of the illustrious family who perhaps classed all below noble rank as barmaids.

She found among her father's books, in the room behind the shop, an old Peerage; and, with ever-increasing heaviness of spirit, read the record of the family.

"Brentwood, fifth earl of," viscount, baron, etc.—the grandiose details overwhelmed her. The compiler of the book seemed to gloat in snobbish sycophantic ecstasy over the richness of his materials—seeming to say, "Nor is this all. Much more of these potentates I could tell you." It was a fatal heart-constricting book to her. "Heir, his eldest son," and she read the entry concerning the cruel step-brother. She was eager to see what terms would be used to cover or gloze over the humbleness and insignificance of the barmaid wife. Viscount Collingbourne, etc. etc. etc.—"Married." One word, and no more. That was all the horror-struck compiler deigned to say of a connection so repugnant to his sense of the fitness of things. He could not mar his page with further particulars of so improper a union. He hastened to pass on, to resume the noble theme so unseemingly interrupted. Daughters of coronetless working sires should not dream of ever thrusting themselves into such a book; they were of no account; they must not even attempt to learn the import of those high mysteries with which the book ecstatically dealt.

And that was why her lover had remained silent! She

was of no account, a creature from an alien world—who did not understand, whom one need not teach. To the girls of the red-bound book one was formally introduced; one danced with them, took them into supper, and talked to them at once of cousins and aunts; they knew all about one, or, if they didn't one quickly told them. But if for amusement one picked up a girl in the open street, paid her cab fare for her, whistled for her whenever one felt bored—Was that how he thought of her?

She cried over the red-bound book, blotted the entry of Brentwood fifth earl with hot tears. When she went to bed, she could not sleep. In the darkness she lay crying—nearly all her hope was gone.

VII

ALL her fear was justified. He had told her the ugly truth. He could not ask her to marry him—could not even ask her to wait years and years for the time when he might make her his wife.

This afternoon they had taken the train to Vauxhall, had left it at Wimbledon, in order to roam over the common and then work down the hill to Barnes or Putney. They were to have tea together, and return to London by train or omnibus when the sun was setting. It was to be a long happy afternoon, but almost directly she had known that it would end in sadness.

"Gladys, I must talk to you to-day of the future," and she observed at once the constraint in his voice.

"I have been thinking—trying to think of what we can do. We must make some arrangement"—and he looked at her and paused. "We can't go on like this, can we?"

"Why not? Are you tired of me—don't you want me any more?"

"I want you always—but how can that be possible? It is what we must decide—at least, you must decide. Things

you said the other day have forced me to think—very seriously—of what we should do."

She knew then, that this would be their last meeting. She understood that behind his interrupted phrases, his pauses, and hesitations, there was a dreadful blankness, without honest purpose or steadfast aim. She was certain now that he would never say the words she longed to hear.

As they walked across the sun-burnt grass of Wimbledon Common towards the woods and sandy bridle paths below the wind-mill, she tried to talk of indifferent things. He watched her face studiously; and once, when their eyes met, he sighed. A dreadful bitterness of spirit seized her as she thought of the heaving sighs of her first lover. It was all to be gone through again. For the second time she must listen to the feeble excuses, the protracted explanations of a man who is false to his love. There was nothing that he could say now which would not degrade him, and give pain to her.

"Gladys, we must be brave—and discuss things."

"Brave?"

"Well—I mean, we must face the future, and arrange what will be best for both of us."

They were almost the words of her faithless Lionel. She had boasted to Irene that this was a king of men, and now he seemed determined to prove himself worm-like and base. He spoke of being brave, and he seemed more cowardly even than the other man. He could not tell her plainly that he wished to be rid of her.

"Don't say any more, please. I understand, Seymour. Don't be afraid—I understand."

He looked at her anxiously and tenderly; and for a little while said no more about the future. But she knew that it was only a respite, that he was fatally determined to make her listen to all the things she dreaded to hear, that he would not leave her the smallest gleam of hope.

"See," she said, "how pretty the country looks down there. No one could guess that we are so near London."

"Oh, yes," he said. "It is pretty enough. But I am tired of this airless Thames valley. You feel London always—

even when you can't see it. You don't breathe freely. Gladys, I am longing to get right away from London."

"I suppose you will be going soon."

"I don't know. It depends——"

She knew, as she glanced at his face, how he had intended to finish the sentence. He would have said that it depended on her.

"You will take Lord Brentwood to the country or the seaside, I suppose."

"My father doesn't require my help."

"He will go with your sister?"

"Yes, if he goes. But he is ill—I don't know when he will be well enough to travel. . . . I was thinking of myself. Just now in the train, I was wishing that it would run on and on—and take us hundreds of miles away from everybody. . . . Let us sit down here—the ground is quite dry. . . . Gladys, think of the pretty places—not like these dusty suburbs—but really pretty places—that are calling to us—where we can hide from all the world."

Then he echoed the baleful sense of Irene's advice. You were young only once: when the chance of joy came, you should grasp it at all hazards: the chance might never come again. Not coarsely, after the manner of Irene, but veiling it with graceful words, he sketched the honeymoon tour that can start so easily without organ music, orange wreath, or fools to throw rice. That was his proposal.

"Gladys, come with me—and let us be happy all by ourselves till the summer is over."

"Is that what you call our future—till the summer is over?"

No, he said eagerly, it was only the opening of the future. The rest would take care of itself. They would come back to London; their friendship would be strengthened; they would be bound together by the memory of these golden weeks; he would always be her staunch, true friend, upon whom she could absolutely rely.

"No, I can't go with you . . . Oh, I wish you hadn't said this."

"But what else can I say? Gladys, you must know you can trust me—you must know how I love you. I'd do anything in my power——"

"Stop, please. You told me I was to decide——"

"Yes—you must decide."

"Then I am sorry. But I cannot do it."

They got up and walked; sat again, walked again; and the ugly sordid talk went on. It seemed to her that the sunlight had faded, the landscape had lost all brightness and color. The very last of her glorious hope was gone. She had desperately struggled to keep a little hope, and he had brutally taken it from her. As, arguing with her, he continued his entreaties, all attributes of dignity and strength forsook him. Her solid, prince-like lover was tumbling into dust.

"Don't—please don't say any more. Seymour, can't you understand me? I would have been content to go on, just as we were—for me to see you when you wanted. Now, I can never meet you again. You have made it impossible."

"Nonsense. Of course we'll meet. Whatever you decide—I must see you as before."

"No. You don't care for me really. You have shown that now. You care only for yourself—or you would understand."

"I am fonder of you than ever——"

And he pleaded for the maintenance of their friendship on any terms.

"No," she said resolutely. "I'll never see you again."

Then, at last, he spoke to her of marriage—of its hopeless impossibility.

"I thought you would know that. I told you that I was poor. Gladys, I haven't thought enough of what you expected me to do. I have been selfish—thinking only of myself—as you say. It is quite true. I ought to have looked ahead. Perhaps you have thought—that—we would be married, one day. Perhaps you thought of that in the beginning."

"In the beginning I thought of nothing. I was unhappy before you met me—and you have made me more unhappy."

Then, with shame and contrition, he upbraided himself as

a selfish, unthinking wretch. He told her that he would never pardon himself if he had made her really unhappy.

"Gladys, don't think meanly of me. If I were rich, I would ask you to marry me to-morrow. But how can I?"

In this sad hour she could not help thinking meanly of him. All that he said sounded cowardly, pitiful, and unworthy.

"I have three hundred a year—not a penny more."

It seemed to her ignorance a most sufficient income.

"Three hundred! I can't live on it myself. How could we two live on it? I can't ask you to come and starve with me. You *do* see that it is impossible?"

He told her that he had been reared with costly tastes, the habits of a man of means—and then had been more or less abandoned to his own most inadequate resources. If he had any reason to expect an increase of income later on—if he could be sure that Lord Brentwood would bequeath to him only as much again as he had now, he might speak of marriage as something possible one day, if not to be dreamed of now. But he had no well-founded expectation of any improvement in his circumstances. And by no conceivable effort would he be likely, at his age, to succeed in making money for himself. His education had rendered him useless for work.

She scarcely listened to him. She had heard it all before. His feeble helpless apologies for an inability to wrestle with destiny were an almost exact repetition of the other man's words. Her universe was falling into dust. All that she had trusted as solid was empty and unreal.

"What could I do?" he said, with a dreadful helpless smile. "I could not go to your father and ask him to give me employment in his business."

"No," she said bitterly, as she thought of the other man, "you had better find a wife with three thousand a year, and marry her."

It was a long sad afternoon; and before it was over, bitterness passed and only sorrow was left. He had agreed that they should part for ever. This was the end of the friendship.

Lamps were lit in the shabby desolate King's Road when he brought her home, and he stood with her in the dark side street that leads to the river, while he bade her goodbye.

"I shall always be grateful to you," he said. "You don't know how much you have done for me. If from selfishness —from not thinking—I have caused you pain, try to forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive, Seymour. It has been my fault —all my fault."

And, sobbing, she begged him to remember her with kindness.

"Don't be angry with me, Seymour, for not doing what you asked. I *couldn't*. If you had been different—I mightn't have seen all the pain it would bring. If—but then you shouldn't have made me so fond of you. Do you understand? No, it's my fault—not yours. I let myself get too fond of you to be happy with you—unless I could be sure we would be together for life."

"My poor Gladys."

She dried her eyes, and held up her face for him to kiss.

"Goodbye, Seymour."

"I am never to see you again?"

"No—never."

"Very well—if it *must* be so. You have decided. Goodbye."

VIII

WITHOUT her he was miserable. Dullness, blankness, intolerable boredom fell upon him. He went back to his clubs, hunted up his friends, dined again with anybody who would ask him to dinner. But wherever he went, whatever he did, he was thinking of her.

He wanted to leave London, but the dull days passed and still he lingered. A man asked him to go to Norway; but he could not make up his mind to accept the invitation. He

could not say Yes or No, begged for time to think it over; then, when the man spoke of it again, he said he could not go. Vacillation and indecision possessed him. He thought he would go to Switzerland, find some valley off the tourist track, where he could tramp and climb and tire himself so that he would sleep soundly on the hard bed of his cheap inn. But even while he thought, he knew that he would not go. He knew that he was still in London because it still contained this girl.

She might call him back to her. Suppose she wrote to him when he was far away. He would wait a little longer on the chance of a letter of recall.

She did not write to him, but she haunted him. He could not escape from her pale face, her candid gaze, her frank smile. There had been nothing between them really; yet he seemed to be bound to her indissolubly. One evening he went with two men to a music hall. It was late, and nobody cared for the performance: they strolled about the promenade behind the dress-circle, talked to other men, smoked, and almost stifled themselves in the heated atmosphere of this temple of noise, vulgarity, and brainless folly. Among the prowling men were girls who walked briskly to and fro, who with swift side glances, a turn of the head, a lowered eyelid, or a furtive grin, offered themselves to anybody seeking a well-dressed, well-scented, and well-painted lady-friend. One of them seemed to him like her. She had the same slender girlish figure, the delicate oval of the face with narrow chin, the same poise of the head. It was a horrible mocking resemblance, of something tawdry and base, to something rare and priceless. The thought came to him with a stab of pain: Suppose she dropped to this one day. Suppose she were here now—offering herself in the public market place, saying, "Take me now, Seymour. You can afford the price now."

When his friends turned to look for him, he was gone. The place had become a pest-house: he could breathe this foul air no longer; he hurried out into the street.

An impulse that at first he could not control moved him. He must go to her and see her, herself and not her haunting ghost, before he slept to-night. He jumped into a cab, and told

the man to drive to the King's Road Chelsea as fast as the horse could be pushed along. His intention was to present himself at the dingy side-door and insist on speaking with her. If the father was there, he would somehow make the father his friend and ally—bribe him, flatter him, bully him, somehow overcome opposition. But the father might be out of the way, or in bed and snoring. Perhaps she herself would come down and open the door to him. Then he would throw his arms about her, hold her against his beating heart, set his lips upon hers, and feel again the solace and ease that mysteriously flowed from her. He would compel her to come out and walk with him, in the moonlight by the water, while again he talked to her.

But what should he say to her? What new thing could be tell her? In a moment his resolve wavered, his mind changed. Lifting the shutter above his head, he spoke to the cab-driver.

"All right. Go slow now. I find I have plenty of time."

No sense in disturbing her—selfish, caddish, mean to worry her when she had begged him to leave her alone. He could see her face again, wet with tears, lips trembling, eyebrows contracted. What could he say to her, except that he was sorry to have caused her distress?

He stopped the cab in Sloane Square, and walked on past her humble home. There was light behind the drawn blinds of the windows over the shop, but he did not ring the bell at the side-door. He walked on, where he had walked with her, down the side street to the river; and thought of her with remorse and contrition, and of himself with a self-pity that was slowly turning to self-contempt.

He had wasted his life—That was what he told himself as he walked by the moon-lit water. All that he did, all that he thought now, was futile, incomplete, unsubstantial. This girl had been sweet and kind to him—pitying him, had wished to console him. But no one could help him. He was past help, because he was unstable, empty of fixed resolve, incapable of definite effort.

His regret, when he thought of the girl, was plain and rational enough. For her he had proved himself a muddling,

selfish, pain-producing fool. He had drawn her from the dull round of her days, unsettled her for her mean surroundings, her drudgery, and lonely tasks; and then had abandoned her. Selfishly, aimlessly, he had filled her with hopes that he could not realize.

One evening he received a most unusual invitation—to dine at Andover House. Coming down the stairs, he happened to meet Lady Emily; and she begged him to join her in the small dining-room, where her modest meal would be served immediately.

"If you are not engaged, do have dinner with me."

"Thank you, Emily. I shall be delighted."

Servants, entering the room, were surprised to see Lady Emily's guest; but a place at the table was speedily prepared.

The hostess meekly apologized for her scanty menu—a sole, some hashed chicken, and a rice pudding.

"I fear, Seymour, you will get a very poor dinner."

"All that I want, Emily. I'm not hungry; and you have saved me from solitude."

"It is so kind of you," said Lady Emily. "I was feeling lonely. You have saved me, too."

When the rice pudding arrived, she informed the two footmen that she would trouble them no further, and they retired. While she ate her pudding, she told Seymour that she was in the lowest spirits about Brendles, and it was the greatest relief to share her anxiety—if only for half an hour—with a member of the family.

"Do you think father would see me when you go up to him?"

"Yes," said Lady Emily, "I would like you to see him—if he is not too tired."

"Has he been out driving to-day?"

"No, we have kept him indoors since Monday."

"I should have thought air would do him good."

"Dr. Prescott says a—a puff of air might blow him away," and Lady Emily began to sniff and sob. "Dr. Prescott said it quite callously. 'A touch of pneumonia—and that would be the end.' "

Seymour endeavored to console his sister, and soon she was more cheerful.

"I can't see any change in him, Seymour. If it wasn't for Dr. Prescott, I should say he was getting better. Poor darling, his rest is broken at night—but then he sleeps so much in the day."

One of the footmen returned with coffee; and Lady Emily, sipping it with a spoon, became quite cheerful.

"It has done me so much good—talking to you, dear Seymour. Do dine with me now and then."

Lady Emily, thoroughly cheerful now, began soon to prattle of the dim past, "when we were children at Collingbourne Court;" and very soon her brother's thoughts wandered.

He looked up with a start. Lady Emily had become vague and unsubstantial: a gray old ghost, seated in the midst of fading grandeurs, twaddling of men and things that were dead and gone.

"I beg your pardon, Emily."

"What were you thinking of so deeply, Seymour dear?"

"Well—I was selfishly thinking of myself. . . . If I were really stuck for money—if I were going to be married—would father do anything for me?"

"*Are* you going to be married?"

"No. That is—I don't think so. But if I was, would he help me?"

"Oh, I hope—I believe——" Lady Emily was agitated and flustered. "Seymour dear, he is far too ill to be troubled with business. You really mustn't ask him any questions of that sort just now. If you are worried yourself with business affairs, can't Mr. Latham attend to it—or Mr. Killick? Go to Mr. Killick in Lincoln's Inn Fields and ask him. But please, please don't upset father."

"No, no. I had no intention. Don't be alarmed, Emily. I promise not to speak to him of business."

Presently Lady Emily conducted her brother to the corridor on the first floor, and left him waiting at a little distance from the curtained doorway while she went in to demand for him brief audience.

Audience was refused. Perhaps Lady Emily, timorously guarding her loved invalid, could not trust the discretion of the visitor. She came back with a courteous message.

"He sends his love, Seymour, but would rather see you some other time. . . . I hope I haven't made you too anxious about him. Schuman says he has not coughed once during the last hour. I shall give him a game of draughts and get him to bed. Good-night, dear Seymour."

It was after five on the following day when Seymour entered the offices of Messrs. Killick and Mills in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and begged for an interview with the senior partner.

He was surprised, after waiting a very few minutes, by the suavity and deference with which Mr. Killick received him.

"My dear sir"—old Mr. Killick had come bustling to the outer office—"Step into my room—this way."

Bowing and smiling, Mr. Killick ushered Seymour to the highest seat of honor—the leather armchair facing the big table in the senior partner's private room.

"I must apologize, Mr. Killick. I ought not to bother you with my very unimportant affairs—but I wanted to ask you one or two questions; and, as you manage things for my father, I thought perhaps you would not mind."

"Mind!" said Mr. Killick. "My dear Mr. Charlton, I am simply delighted to see you. The assistance of myself—and my firm is yours to command at all times."

Seymour wished to know about the money left in trust for him by the late Lady Brentwood. Could he, in an emergency, touch the capital sum?

Mr. Killick knew all about this minor trust, as well as about the greater family trusts, and he replied at once that the Trustees could not advance funds out of capital.

"I am quite sure of that. You have, as far as I remember, power of appointment yourself, and can leave the money to whom you please—the trust ending with your death. And you could of course raise something on your life interest—but that would be a most uneconomical proceeding. I could never advise you to do that."

"Yes, but I am so infernally hard up."

Mr. Killick shrugged his shoulders, nodded his head gravely, opened his hands deprecatingly, as though shocked and distressed by this sad fact.

"Mr. Killick, is my father hard up, too?"

"Your father?" Mr. Killick laughed gaily. "No, certainly not. His lordship's property has been steadily increasing in value for the last twenty years—not to speak of possible accumulations during the same period. I betray no secrets in saying that your father is, as times go, one of the wealthiest noblemen of his degree."

"Then don't you think he ought to do something more for me?"

"I do think so, indeed," said Mr. Killick, with warmly sympathetic tone.

"I suppose I mustn't ask you if my father has provided for me in his will—or even if he had made a will."

"Well, no. Frankly, those are questions which I could not very well answer without your father's authority. You may, however, take it from me that I should not have done my duty to one in Lord Brentwood's position, unless I had urged him not to die intestate. . . . But again, when one speaks of provision by will—A will may be revoked; a later will may be made. Life," said the old solicitor, with a rather pompous solemnity, "is so full of surprises. That is what one always has to remember, Mr. Charlton."

"Well, thank you for——"

"Don't rise, I beg. If you aren't in a hurry.—Our conversation has not taken the turn which I at first anticipated—but you have made it easy for me to say what I should have had a delicacy about mentioning."

Then, slightly to his mortification, Seymour learned that his hard-up state was so widely notorious that rumors of it had long since reached Lincoln's Inn Fields. This old fellow, it seemed, had even attempted to ameliorate his uncomfortable condition; and now was asking to be thanked for his interference. There was something humiliating in the thought of the solicitor playing the part of unknown friend.

"If I may say so, your father's treatment of you is very wrong. I have felt this so strongly that I took it on myself to make representations to his lordship on your behalf—that some settled provision would be proper—only proper in the circumstances—in view of the uncertainty of life."

And Mr. Killick proposed to ring for his clerk to bring letter-books, in which Mr. Charlton might read, and satisfy himself on the strength of these fruitless but well-intentioned representations.

"Thank you, please don't trouble."

"You'll take my word for it—Just so. But I assure you, Mr. Charlton, I did urge it very strongly, that to give nothing to you who might one day have all——"

"Oh, that's ancient history. My chances all went long ago."

But again the solicitor used his pompous, and apparently favorite, phrase.

"Just so—But life is so uncertain."

"I can't," said Seymour with a constrained laugh, "expect my brother and his family to go out in a boat, and all get drowned together to oblige me—and God forbid they should."

"God forbid it indeed," said Mr. Killick, piously. "But come now, I am really so desirous to assist you.—This is my suggestion. If you'll authorize me to approach his lordship for you, and put before him such arguments as——"

"No. My father is not well enough to be bothered."

"But I am often at Andover House. I would wait until a suitable opportunity offered——"

"No, thank you. I am much obliged, but——"

"Think it over. You may trust me to plead your cause with the utmost——"

Seymour felt the blood rising to his forehead, and yet was ashamed of his irritation.

"Thank you," he said firmly and coldly. "I will plead my own cause with my father—if necessary."

"A third party is generally more effective. But you know best, of course. Think things over. . . . And—how shall I put it?—if pressed by the requirements of the hour, well, will you let us be your bankers?"

"Do you mean—lend me money?"

"Yes—with the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you," said Seymour very coldly. "I should not quite care about that, either."

Seymour walked away from Lincoln's Inn Fields, once more to think things over. He had been curiously humiliated by the latter part of his interview with the solicitor. This old man, while appearing to pay court to him, perhaps was secretly despising him. The man wished to take charge of him, as of one confessedly impotent. The man would plead his cause. Those ill-chosen words rankled.

But he knew that irritation was not logical. Can a healthy male of thirty-five with an income of three hundred a year go whining for money, and expect people to admire him for courage, strength, and self-reliance?

Suddenly the thought came clear and strong. He must be done with this unworthy alms-begging. There must be no more whining to sister, father, family solicitor. It was too humiliating.

As he walked on, he thought of his brother with a new and strange respect. Collingbourne had often sneered at him as a hanger-on, a docile dependent, a contented eater of humble pie. Suddenly he felt that the sneers were not undeserved; or at least he felt that he could understand Collingbourne's critical standpoint. Right or wrong, Collingbourne had lived his own life, been his own lawgiver, standing firmly on his own legs, defying the universe to shake him. He cared less than nothing for the opinion of the world; he made his road and followed it; when he met a woman he could love, he clave to her. And why not? Collingbourne, in this as in everything else, right or wrong, had satisfied himself and not hesitated. If you get the wife you want, you can forego the approval of cousins and aunts. Approving or disapproving, they won't have to live with her.

Looking backward through the years, Seymour saw himself guided, controlled, taken charge of always. He had tamely submitted himself to the rule of others, until they had robbed him of natural volition. He had been sent hither and thither,

blown about by kindness or caprice, until he had become as a straw on the surface of shallow water: not even *drifting* consistently, turning, eddying, with no tide of deep purpose to carry him. Others had thought for him and decided for him, until dreams and life had mingled. They had pushed him into dreamland, because in life they would not let him act as a waking man. Self-contempt stung sharply while he looked into the past.

He had walked all the way to Hyde Park, and now, seated alone beneath the trees, he was looking at the well-dressed crowd. The London season was practically finished; next week the Goodwood meeting would mark its death; soon everybody who is anybody would be gone. But they were here now, taking the evening air, sauntering, lounging, lolling —moving without aim, pausing without reason,—the little trivial world of fashion, pride, and folly.

Ants on a restricted ant-heap, slowly burying themselves under futilities—he looked long and hard at them, and silently abjured them and their ways for ever. He would be like them no more. He looked at the women, and saw gaudy artifice, decorated pretension, grinning insincerity. He looked at the men, and saw—or fancied he saw,—stamped on their faces, the heavy print of long-established incompetence.

He would listen to the message of the song. Be done with futilities—grasp at and hold fast to essentials. At last he had made up his mind; and he did not realize that, through all his vacillation, he had been steadily reaching the final decision.

He would marry his Gladys. He would ask aid from no one. They needed no aid: they possessed between them all that is essential. She should be his wife as soon as possible. If only to make her happy, it would be worth doing. If only to efface the memory of his explanations and excuses, he must do it. He had said to her in effect: "I can only beg, to dig I am ashamed." He must wipe that out and regain self-respect by saying: "If you are not afraid of being a poor man's wife, I am ready to work for you till I drop."

IX

HE tried to see her that evening, but failed. Miss Copland, said the untidy maid of No. 220A King's Road, was out, singing probably: she had taken her music case with her. Mr. Copland and Mrs. Pascall were also out. Would he leave a message? He asked many questions, but he left no message. The young lady was quite well, the servant informed him; she would be at home to-morrow, no doubt; there had not been any talk of her going out of town. Then he went away contented. He would not disturb her to-night. She was safe, within his reach—no cruel fate had intervened to snatch her from him.

Next day seemed to him the most peaceful happiest day of his long restless life. Very early in the morning he sent his message. "I cannot live without you. Meet me at eleven in the old place. If you do not come, I shall go to your house and wait for you there."

Just at first there was pain—sharp twinges of remorse—as he saw the harm he had done her. She moved with languid steps; she was dreadfully pale; her eyes looked tired; her hand, as he pressed it tightly, was weak and nerveless.

"Seymour, I have come because I was a coward. I wanted so badly to see you—but I ought not to have come. What is it you want?"

"I want you to be my wife."

Then in simple manly fashion he made his straightforward proposal. No preparations needed now—words of direct import saying themselves as fast as they could get out.

"If you are not afraid, I am not afraid. We'll rub along. Don't be afraid, my darling. I'm a wretched bad match for anybody, but you are so brave—you won't mind roughing it. But we won't rough it—I'll work wonders"—and his plans and hopes bubbled from his lips. "We'll get married at once. Take me home now—at once—and let me ask your father's consent. Will he give his consent? We can't wait for it. Don't let's ask for it, till after we're married."

But she said No, again and again. She, too, had thought things over. It would not do. They belonged to different worlds.

"Gladys, you are the world—all worlds rolled into one—*my* world."

"Your friends and relations would consider that you had lowered yourself—disgraced yourself. You would be like the Lord of Burleigh—making an experiment that never answers. You would be ashamed of my father and his shop—you would soon be ashamed of *me.*"

She struggled to refuse him, but he felt no dread. Nothing could take her from him now. It was only a little remorseful discomfort for him, as he recognized her sweet unselfishness and considered how lightly he once held her.

"Seymour, it would not do—you would not be happy. Your people would say you had done what your brother did—married a barmaid;" and she smiled sadly as she quoted the family phrase.

She had no such thoughts once. She had derived all these heavily oppressive notions from his careless aimless talk. Moreover, she had eaten of the fruit of the tree of evil or snobbish knowledge. Out of that horrible red-bound book—with its *Brentwood, fifth earl of,* etc. etc.—she had extracted bitter indigestible food for reflection. The poisonous teaching of this volume reversed her childish ignorant beliefs. On every page the romantic untenable maxims of her poets were crushingly contradicted. Kind hearts—said the book—are infinitely less than coronets; the man is not the man for a' that, but for a' this and a' this.

"You don't think now what you are giving up, Seymour."

"I give up *nothing.* I get *all.*"

"If I consented—I should know that you were renouncing everything."

Of course she consented. He was free from dread of her unselfish obstinacy. He loved her for resisting him; he loved her because he knew she had already yielded. Color and light had returned to her eyes; the blood was dancing in her veins; her step was elastic; she was walking on air.

"Listen," he said joyously. "Have it your own way. I *do* renounce everything. I *have* renounced it."

It was all right now, and in the happy hours till they separated—only to meet again. No more stabbings of remorse —sunlight, laughter, innocent joy. They were like children playing, like birds flying;—like the sparkling stream that mirrored in its bosom all the pretty things it passed, and if it turned the world upside down, still made it seem beautiful.

"Listen to my renunciation."

They were leaning on the parapet below the bridge, and across the sunlit water he could see the town busy with life and hope. Puffs of white smoke rose from cranes and steam winches; chains rattled and swung; the warehouses were swarming with life and activity; gay little men clambered and toiled about the tiers of barges by the wharfs; and faintly, cheerfully, sweetly, came floating to him voices that sang at their happy toil.

"Listen to me, Gladys, and don't laugh. This is my solemn renunciation. I renounce Pond my tailor, Block my hatter, Crew my hosier—I renounce them utterly. I renounce all hope of motors, special trains, private balloons, deck cabins, and first-floor suits in Ritz hotels. I renounce Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle—and all other secret hidden places where spines are bent, eyes are lowered, and men move like crabs sideways and backwards. I renounce all ambition to pass through doors that are opened only by golden keys. I renounce the enclosure at Ascot, the garden at Cowes, the stalls of the Opera. I renounce the House of Commons— and all other houses which smell of dust, which are lit without windows, and of which the air is never cleared except by *talk*. I renounce all empty shams, varnished pretences, and glittering futilities. And I claim and take old clothes, hard work, a light heart—and Gladys."

Turning, and walking fast in search of a cab, they prattled gaily of the radiant future. She showed her rapturous delight now, without attempt to mask it. He was in earnest—terribly, entrancingly, overpoweringly in earnest. No reason to doubt or hesitate. They would live and work together—the world forgetting, by the world forgot.

In his desire for the realities of life, he was becoming as democratically radical as his brother Collingbourne. He seemed to long for the workman's jacket or upturned shirt sleeves—as if nothing short of labor performed in the sweat of the brow could appease his new craving. He would drop that silly useless prefix of Honorable; he would be honorable merely as a worker who punctually does his task; he would not be Esquire even; no, nor Mister; he would be plain Seymour Charlton.

"You can never be that," said Gladys. "You'll always be handsome—dreadfully handsome Seymour Charlton."

They made their feeble little childish jests and thought they were funny—if nobody else did. The man in the queer old house near St. Paul's churchyard—so difficult to find, so dim and old and dreamlike when they found it,—this wonderful magician of a man who gave them their marriage license, thought them idiotic as most of the couples who came to him.

Seymour could not rest until he had armed himself with a license. Reckless—for the last time—of the cost of fares, he took her hither and thither in a cab, kept the cab waiting, forgot the cab, had to hunt for the cab. The cab bill—last extravagance—was enormous. First they went to his club; and she sat smiling, dreaming in the cab, while he wrote and cashed a check, feverishly studied *Whitaker's Almanac,* and learned how people get married.

The man near St. Paul's, slowly preparing his world-changing mandate, gave back to Seymour the useless and abrogated Honorable: almost testily insisted that Seymour could not be married without it.

"Father: the Earl of Brentwood. But look here, wait a minute. You haven't described yourself properly. This means you are The Honorable—and I haven't left space for it."

"Then don't put it in. It isn't necessary."

"Pardon me," said the man rather testily. "It is necessary, and I shall have to put it in—with a caret. You must both describe yourself properly. . . . Father: Alfred William Copland. Any title?"

No. No title for Papa.

Seymour made the prescribed declaration on oath, and the man went on writing.

It was soon ready—a wonderful scroll with absurdly large seal, authorizing the solemn nupitals of Gladys Copland, Spinster, at her parish church—St. Judith's, Chelsea. She looked at it through happy tears, while Seymour paid for it and the man gave him change.

They had luncheon together in a noisy crowded restaurant, but they were really quite alone. The rattle of plates and knives, the chorus of many voices, made a pleasant soothing music. Their happiness isolated them, built walls round them through which no prying eyes could peep; and yet their happiness seemed world-wide; they might look to the ends of the earth, and see nothing that they did not wish to see.

Their appetite was excellent.

They were talking now of the honeymoon. They would go to Yorkshire—to some little seaside place near Whitby—some fisherman's village in a bay. She would require at least a week to set her costumes in order. She would not let him buy her the simplest and cheapest of trousseaux—nothing would persuade her to accept this unusual benefit; and she implored him to give her no present—no ring even, except the essential ring of plain gold.

"Then don't buy things yourself. Wait till we are married."

"Some things I *must* get. Seymour, I shall be fearfully shabby—I shall disgrace you among the fishermen. Their wives will be smarter. Some sort of travelling coat I must get——"

"Yes, a warm one—a thick one. Something to keep you warm. That's all that matters."

As he watched her face—saw the light of love and hope in her eyes, the color glowing with her happy thoughts,—new and still new feelings were rushing in upon him. He yearned over her, gloried in her, thrilled with joy that he possessed this good great power over her.

"Never mind what the coat looks like—get one very thick, and very very warm. No, let me get it for you."

He felt as if she was the first woman he had known. But

he understood why. Because this was only the first time he had thought thus about any woman.

Evening had come before they separated. He walked through the streets with strong firm steps. He was another man—happy and at peace with the universe. He walked through Mayfair laughing at its petty pomps and vanities, but feeling no angry disgust or fretful scorn. Goodbye—a long goodbye! He had listened to the message of her song, and had obeyed it.

In his room at Andover House, he dragged out drawers, piled the chairs with folded garments, and began to pack his trunks. He intended to vacate the room to-morrow. He would take some convenient attic in Jermyn Street—he could not begin the new life too soon. All this useless property he would sell for what it might fetch. A gentleman's extensive wardrobe, together with jewellery comprising numerous sets of tie pins, shirt-studs, sleeve links, waistcoat buttons—what offers?

He looked out of window, and drew deep breaths. The yellow evening sunbeams struck upon distant roofs and chimneys, but this side of the great house was all in shadow. The pigeons were circling round the house before they settled down to roost on the dark stone ledge or in the blackened stone cornice. Strong on the wing, they made their swift circles, as if tied to the house by invisible strings, though all the world was open to them.

He laughed at the foolish birds. He was a bird who had broken its string. This, he told himself, was the last night he would roost here.

X

NEXT morning he was sleeping deeply and tranquilly when a servant, some time before the usual hour, came and roused him. There was a man down below who wanted

to see him on some important business. A respectable sort of man—reported the servant,—and he was sorry to disturb Mr. Charlton, but he could discharge his errand with nobody else. He said the business concerned Lord Collingbourne.

Seymour saw this man presently, in a room of the basement. Sleepy servants were beginning to stir down here; doors opened and banged; kitchen maids and scrubbing wenches stared at him as he hurried through the prison-like passages. These lower regions—never explored by him till now—seemed extensive and intricate as a town: an underground working town concealed beneath the upper idle magnificence.

"I'm sorry, sir, to bring such news. He's your brother, sir, isn't he? I bring bad news—the worst news."

Then the man's words were brief and direct.

Lord Collingbourne was dead. Last night there had been a street meeting, violent speeches, interference by the guardians of the law—meeting broken up by the police, something like a running fight; and Lord Collingbourne, running or fighting, had suddenly collapsed. It was heart failure; they carried him home to the Battersea flat dead or dying.

His wife, Lady Collingbourne, had told the man to take the news to Mr. Charlton.

"It would be a kindness to go to her, sir. She's like one distraught."

Before he left the house, Seymour had a few words with Lady Emily. She loved her brother: the news must be conveyed to her gently and cautiously. He would tell her nothing definite now—merely prepare her mind for approaching sorrow.

Lady Emily, in a loose dressing wrapper, with snakelike wisps of gray hair hanging about her white face, was grievously agitated by the maid's summons. She thought she had been summoned to her father, burst out into the corridor, and would not let Seymour speak.

"They want me! He has been ill in the night, Seymour. Schuman was sleeping, and he was ill. The nurse is off duty. I was with him till an hour ago. Dr. Prescott says he is dangerously ill."

Seymour was compelled to wait till she returned from her father's room.

"Emily, I must tell you of a message I have just received —about Collingbourne—Some serious accident, or severe illness. I am going to Battersea now—and I will see you again as soon as I get back. This is very serious, Emily."

"Oh, what shall I do?" and she looked at him piteously. "Poor Colley. I ought to go to him—but I can't leave my poor dear. I am so frightened about Brendles."

Seymour, mounting the stone stairs to the third floor of Trafalgar Mansions, glanced through a narrow window, caught a glimpse of green tree tops and grass, and thought of his love. Over there in the sunlight he had sat with her, and seen for the last time the dead man. He would not be able to meet her to-day. Death and not life claimed the day.

A clean and neatly dressed maid-servant admitted him to the flat, which was larger, better furnished than he had anticipated—a comfortable home really: a workman's common dwelling only in perverted Mayfair phrase. The room in which he stood waiting for the bereaved wife was evidently his brother's library or workshop. Here were his books of reference—hundreds of them lining the walls; photographs of landscapes—scenes of his adventurous travels; an American desk with innumerable drawers, trays, compartments. Here he had sat and composed his fiery newspaper screeds, or made notes for his revolutionary speeches, while perhaps his children played a game with bricks or trains upon the hearth-rug. That little boy used the room. There were toys on a table; and in the corner, already wind-battered and broken, was the gaily colored box-kite sent by the newly discovered uncle as a first present. Up here on the third floor a chilling silence seemed to reign. Neighbors perhaps had hushed their voices to-day. Seymour thought of the overbearing presence that had filled these silent rooms, of the angry voice now silent for ever.

Then the wife came—weeping, semi-hysterical,—not at all the woman he had imagined. She could never have been hand-

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some; she was about forty years old, stout, matronly, with a kind intelligent face, now red, swollen, distorted by tears and pain. She spoke brokenly, but without any common accent or vulgar idiom—really only a barmaid when measured by red-book standards.

The little boy, Ned, held her hand, trembled and stared—appalled and stupefied by the vastness of the calamity that had fallen upon his mother and himself.

"O Mr. Charlton, it is too cruel—too bitterly cruel."

She showed plainly great grief and great love; but in her lamentations she was difficult to understand.

"To be taken from us now,—to be struck down in an hour—and leave us helpless. Not to outlive his father—if even for a year or so . . . Oh, be kind to my fatherless children. Help us, oh, help us. He trusted you—he always praised you—he trusted to your kindness."

Seymour promised to do all in his power to aid her. He would make arrangements for the funeral, would relieve her of all those dreadfully sad duties, would communicate with his father's solicitors. They could provide money; she need think of nothing but her sorrow.

Returning to Andover House, he stopped at a Post Office and despatched a telegram to Gladys. He could not meet her to-day—for a little while he must forget his love, and think only of the grief of others.

He broke the news to Lady Emily, sat with her for an hour and more, listening to her, talking to her, soothing her until she recovered something like composure. Then came the problem of more news-breaking. How and when should the news be broken to Lord Brentwood?

Not till to-morrow, said Dr. Prescott of Hertford Street. If my lord should sleep well to-night, show a stronger pulse, and a lower temperature to-morrow morning, Lady Emily, with the Doctor to assist her, might break the news.

Seymour and Lady Emily both thought it advisable to remind the doctor, as delicately as was possible, that Lord Brentwood and his dead son had not for many years been on speaking terms. Lord Brentwood's sensations when he

heard of his loss, one might regretfully guess, would not be those of poignant grief.

"It is not a question of grief," said Dr. Prescott. "It is a question of shock—and here we have no vitality to resist shock. To-morrow then, I'll come early, and we'll tell him—but only if we find him better."

And to Seymour, in the corridor when the door was closed upon Lady Emily, the doctor added: "We are very near the end, I fear. However, he may be better to-morrow."

But to-morrow my lord was worse. The next day he was unconscious; and so it happened that no human tongue could tell him how Collingbourne, rudely ignoring the table of precedence, had pushed before him to pass through the dark entry, and now stood beckoning in the halls of silence.

Day after day Seymour was forced to forget himself and think only of others. He wrote to Gladys—a few hurried lines from time to time,—telling her of the family troubles and afflictions, and of his longing to be with her again; and she replied, sweetly and tenderly, that he was to do his duty without a care for her. She was with him in spirit—he might be certain of that.

He attended his brother's funeral at Norwood Cemetery; stood in the sunlight by the grave; watched and heard the eldest boy, the future Lord Brentwood, blubbering sincerely and irrepressibly; watched the widow red-eyed, desolate, weeping and wringing her hands; watched the grave-diggers' expressionless faces; and came away as from a cruel pageant of woe—an acted sorrow to tear the hearts of those whose sorrow is real.

Back again at Andover House, he could feel that death was still in the air. Outside, men with wagons of straw were spreading silence. Within and without, the hush and chill of death was falling; doors were shut by slow careful hands; servants walked on tip-toe; all was so quiet that from the grand staircase one could hear Lady Emily sobbing convulsively in her room. Thus it was day after day, while behind the curtained door my lord lay gasping for breath, with faintly

glittering eyes stared at eternity, feebly and more feebly wrestled with the overwhelming shadows.

To Seymour these slowly gliding days were like a troubled dream when one sleeps lightly, knows one is dreaming, yet cannot wake oneself.

He longed for free movement and unfettered thought; he was yearning for his love, because love was life—the new strong life that he had only now discovered. But in the moment of grasping freedom, fate had pinioned him. It was as if the great house itself held him. The stone walls, the stately pedimented roof, claimed their prisoner. You are ours, and you shall not escape.

Of an evening in his room, he looked at his half-packed trunks and the hasty disorder he had made; and felt a sick weariness, a hopeless disgust, an impotent revolt. Should he ever be free again? Then would come an almost uncontrollable longing to be done with death, to be restored to life. He felt a cowardly craving to sneak away from all these sad duties; to let the dead bury their dead; to fly from the shadows, and fling himself into the light. He knew that such base selfish instincts are common and ineradicable, that all feel them and no one yields to them.

But might he not steal from his post for an hour or two, and take a respite of forgetfulness? He would go to Gladys for an hour's comfort and peace. Yet, while he thought of her, longed for her, pined for her, he knew that he must not talk of love while his father lay dying. Soon now all would be over—he must wait till then.

Indeed it was very near the end now. Twice he stood by his father's bedside, and heard the dreadful losing fight for breath.

Then, between night and day, there was sudden vague noise in the house—of doors opened and shut without caution, of footsteps, voices. And again a bereaved hysterical woman was clinging to him. With his arm round her waist, he drew Lady Emily from the room, led her along the corridor, gave her into the arms of her maid.

"Oh, Brendles—Brendles," she moaned. "Poor darling—

he touched my hand—he looked at me with his dear eyes—he knew me at the last."

But as yet there was no release for Seymour. The airless house—smelling of flowers, of crape, of burning wax, smelling of death—still held him as its prisoner.

"My father," he wrote to Gladys, briefly and hurriedly, "died this morning. My sister is heart-broken. The funeral will take place on the fifth day from now. Till then I see that I shall not be allowed a moment. Directly after the funeral I will come to you."

Everything—his life and his love—must be postponed until once more they had laid a dead man in his grave.

XI

DONE with at last—his task accomplished! He woke refreshed after the long night's dreamless sleep that followed the weary day of funeral solemnities. But one more duty constrained him; it was imperative that he should give one more hour to other people's affairs; Mr. Killick had absolutely insisted upon a morning interview for final discussion of the family business.

He jumped briskly from his cab, and hurried into the solicitor's offices.

The whole establishment seemed to be anxiously waiting for him. Clerks jostled each other as they sprang forth to escort him; junior partners pushed clerks aside, to bow and smile at him. Astounding deference, solicitous attention, tender regard, moved with him as he moved. "Come this way. This passage is so dark—and there's an awkward little step"—Two junior partners, Mr. Herbert Mills and Mr. George Killick, were ushering him to the senior partner's room.

They lingered, smiling at him, when he was securely seated in the best chair by the big desk: they seemed loth to relinquish him, even to the senior partner, unable for a minute

or so to forego the privilege of being in the same apartment with him.

"But we must leave you," said one of them, as, bowing tenderly, they withdrew—"we will leave you with your old friend. That will be better."

"Yes," said Mr. Killick senior, "that may be better."

The old fellow was keenly anxious to be rid of them; he sat smiling and rubbing his hands; and, when they were gone and he began to speak, he showed a most unmistakable enjoyment in the sound of his own voice and the good rich matter it had to deal with.

"Well, now," said Mr. Killick. "About the marriage of Lord Collingbourne's! Well, you know, there was a screw loose in it."

"What does that mean?"

"You understand, of course, our professional etiquette—or professional point of honor: inviolate secrecy between client and solicitor"—Mr. Killick went on slowly, with the utmost enjoyment—"Your brother became our client. Our lips were henceforth sealed. . . .

"There was a husband. I need not go into the history, or my own conjectures. I will give you the simple facts. But, as I understood your brother—and in fairness to all parties I think we should assume these *were* the facts:—He thought—they both thought—the husband was dead. Out there in South Australia they themselves went through the marriage ceremony—Well then, they thought the husband was dead. He *should* have been dead—but, fortunately for you, he was not dead. When your brother came to me, he had suddenly shown himself very much alive; and our task was, well—to square him. He bled your brother heavily—A constant drain for five or six years; and after that he did die."

Then Mr. Killick spoke with high praise of Lady Collingbourne.

" . . . A good true woman—and the best of wives to your brother. She *was* his wife—his lawful wife—during the last six years. But the marriage—the real marriage—again fortunately for you—could not take place till after the birth of the youngest child. . . .

"I have a great respect for Lady Collingbourne. Of my certain knowledge, I can say that she saved your brother from many imprudences—dangers—dangers of the gravest kinds. She was long-suffering. He was not faithful to her—and had she wished to avenge herself—but the thought never entered her mind,—on more than one occasion he laid himself open. . . .

"All this is very painful," said Mr. Killick, obviously and intensely enjoying himself, "but frankness is now necessary. . . .

"We have now to consider very carefully what we shall do first of all. These confounded newspapers have of course made announcements about your father's youthful heir—and so forth. That could not be prevented—or guarded against. We must consider our attitude towards the public. No need to take all the world into one's confidence, but we must issue to the press without further delay an authoritative statement. In wording it you will, I know, agree with me that we should spare Lady Collingbourne's feelings as far as we possibly——"

Seymour had sat silent, dazed by this disclosure. A well-kept secret—never guessed at—never conceived of as a framework on which one might build one's dreams! He felt no elation. He was conscious only of a distaste for further revelations, a weariness of spirit, a sense of impending and unavoidable trouble. He had come here hoping at last to get to the end of all this business concerning other people that was holding him from his love. Now he felt that the business would never end. He had ceased to listen. He was thinking of his brother as he walked hand in hand with the boy; of the latent pathos of his brother's appeal that night in the cloakroom of the club; of the widow's lamentations, unintelligible till you knew the secret, so plain in their meaning now. "He trusted you—he trusted to your kind heart. Oh, help us—help us."

"Well," said Mr. Killick. "That is the consideration. What shall we do?"

Seymour got up, went to the window, and looked out into

the open square—at the dingy but courageous little sparrows hopping and flying about the road, searching for their daily food. No fine feathers, no gilded cage—obscurely happy, safe in their insignificance, self-supporting, self-reliant, free.

"Do nothing," he said firmly. "Let it slide."

"Let matters slide—how do you——"

"I don't want it. I renounce my claim."

Mr. Killick laughed; but he was really flabbergasted.

"You say, renounce——"

"Yes, I don't want it. I won't stand in their way. I promised my brother that if the chance ever came, I'd do his children a good turn. The chance has come, and I'll keep my promise. I give up all to them——"

"You may think that now. But a week hence? My dear Lord Brentwood——"

"Don't call me Lord Brentwood——"

Mr. Killick smilingly told him that he *was* Lord Brentwood, and nothing could prevent his being Lord Brentwood. It would be utterly impossible to give effect to his wildly generous notions.

"You will marry, and have children yourself. What about *them?* They will grow up, and find out the state of the case. Do you think they, or *their* children, would be content to submit for ever to such a wrong?"

Seymour, turning from the window, spoke with an angry fierceness that made him seem to Mr. Killick for a few moments very like the deceased Lord Collingbourne.

"I tell you I don't want it. The thing is a damnable annoyance to me. It cuts my life in two—it drags me back into all I wanted to escape from—it ties me down, when I must and *will* be free. It's as if some devil's game was to be played with me to my dying day—so that I should never choose for myself—but be pushed about—with thoughts rammed into me—words given me to echo——"

"My dear Lord Brentwood, come and sit down, I beg. You are—naturally—overwrought. This has been a shock—but calm yourself. Sit down, I pray, and let me go on talking to you."

Then the solicitor's voice sounded again steadily and smoothly.

Seymour sat, as bidden, and listened to the soothing voice.

His father, said Mr. Killick, had amassed no great hoard. The rent-roll had every year increased, estates had been developed, new sources of wealth had discovered themselves; but immense sums had been put back into the various properties by way of improvement, fostering municipal enterprises, expanding tenants' ventures. Where my lord had thus sown, his successor would reap. Doubtlessly, the late lord had been pillaged by agents—there had been much mismanagement, quite unpreventable by Mr. Killick. But, on the whole, there was little to complain of. By the will the savings were dispersed. It was a characteristic will. There were complimentary legacies for trustees and executors, a year's wages for all servants, handsome dower for Lady Emily, ten thousand pounds for Seymour, and an insulting message for poor Collingbourne.

But the will was nothing—one only spoke of it out of respect to his lordship's memory. What one must speak of, think of, smack one's tongue over, was the vast and glorious inheritance of the settled property. How could one measure its extent? It was very big—and wealth so noble, stable, enduring, so different from the vulgar, liquid, easily estimated fortune of your ordinary millionaire. Yet, somehow or other, they would have to set a value upon it in money terms. One and a half, two millions—they would make a stiff fight over it with Somerset House. In the opinion of Mr. Killick, they would get off cheaply if the Inland Revenue people accepted and passed two millions as the fairly approximate figures.

"Now think how difficult was my position. I knew that this was almost certainly coming to you—and yet I could not give you any light. You know—the other day, when you entered this room, I thought you had found out how the land lay—I *hoped* you had found out . . . "

With undiminished enjoyment, Mr. Killick dwelt upon the wondrous difficulties of his position, and the absolute correctness of his methods in tackling them. No formality had been

neglected; the minutest detail had received attention—all things were now in order.

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Killick. "With heart-felt sincerity, I congratulate you, my dear Lord Brentwood."

XII

NEITHER next day nor for many days did he go to Gladys. He wrote to her, a few lines only, telling her that he was occupied every moment of every hour by new and ever-increasing business. In truth, he was overwhelmed with cares and duties—with everybody again leaning on him for counsel and support, with Mr. Killick, Lady Emily, the entire family demanding and absorbing his attention.

First—a pressing matter to be polished off somehow—was Lady Collingbourne.

Painfully and laboriously he thought out his duty with regard to her. He must not do too little, and he must not do too much. He might defeat his own benevolent purpose if he did too much: she had not been trained in the use of wealth; she could easily fail to administer it wisely. At last he decided—after weighing all the circumstances. He would give her £125,000. At four per cent that would be £5,000 a year—enough for her to live in middle-class affluence with such state as she would probably crave, enough to rear her boys as gentlemen, put them into army or navy, make of them doctors, lawyers, or parsons, and find them means should they never earn a penny. More might shipwreck this little household now fallen under his protection, might render those honest lads idle and dissolute, and leave the simple-minded mother a prey to cheats and greedy adventurers. His thought was quite honest and clear. He would gladly have done more, if more had been needed, if more had not seemed dangerous.

He experienced a pleasant glow of the blood, a voluminous warmth of conscientious satisfaction, as he decided on this first exercise of his new power.

Mr. Killick must raise the money at once by pledging credit with banks or by other methods, create a trust, hand over the cash to trustees; and then, with the thing done for ever, one could dismiss it from one's thoughts, and sleep without dreams of weeping wives and disinherited children.

Every morning he was at the solicitor's offices in Lincoln's Inn Field; and without delay he spoke of his intention.

"I want your advice, Mr. Killick, about the method of providing for my brother's wife."

But when he mentioned the amount of the provision, Mr. Killick, protesting vehemently, said it was too much.

"Outrageously too much," said Mr. Killick. "Half that would be outrageous,—A quarter would be princely—in the circumstances. You have to consider the many claims upon you—and again, what they might reasonably expect. These lads have no fantastic expectation. How have they been brought up? Like a working man's family. I can say emphatically, this good lady will be more than satisfied with £25,000—will declare it generous, magnanimously ample. As who would not?"

Mr. Killick, protesting, arguing, and expounding, fixed £30,000 as his outside limit.

"That, Lord Brentwood, is my unreserved advice: as your solicitor, as a man of the world, and—I hope I may safely add—as a man of honor."

Seymour went away persuaded, but feeling mean. There was no glow—only vague discomfort. Then he thought with exasperation of the arguments by which he had been convinced.

Already people are conspiring to rob him of his power, to take from him the dawning faculty of clear thought, to confuse and stupefy him. He himself had toilsomely thought out the correct amount, had considered all that the lawyer said about not overdoing it, and had *decided*. Now others were deciding for him.

He went stubbornly back to the solicitors' office.

"Mr. Killick," he said, resolutely, "please don't take this amiss—but I must express myself clearly. I asked your ad-

vice just now. But now I come to give you instructions. Be good enough to arrange for the transfer of the sum I named —£125,000. I want it done as soon as possible."

Mr. Killick looked up at him with a smile.

"Very good, my lord. Just as you wish. *Noblesse oblige,* eh? Full measure—and not the balanced scale. I'll carry out your instructions, with alacrity."

What surprised one was that Mr. Killick appeared not huffed, but delighted.

"It was my duty," he continued blandly, "to put things before you in the light of common sense—without sentiment, you know. But I'm glad you have turned your own light upon it. I'm honestly very glad that this poor lady has found such a royal benefactor."

Seymour felt quite a royal glow as he went away this time. He had exerted his dominion worthily; and praise and veneration were his reward.

For a week and more, he was immersed in high cares and onerous employments. Everybody praised him; everybody bowed down to him. The cousins who, grudging him even a penny Christmas card, had always spoken of him with compassionate patronage, now wrote him long letters of congratulation, and begged for his countenance and protection. They said, in effect, that his sudden rise from hopeless insignificance to maximum importance gave them unmixed delight. As humble members of the family, they were enraptured by obtaining such an estimable chieftain. Everyone, openly or insidiously, paid court to him; everyone reminded him of his vast new power. It was wonderful to hold a power so wide-reaching—gradually, the sense of its extent came to him. While he listened to these soothing, flattering voices, he felt that all things were now attainable, that nothing lay beyond his reach. But whenever he was alone—if only for a few moments he sat brooding on his marvellous good fortune, —he felt restless, dissatisfied, and unhappy.

Beneath the surface of his daily thoughts, a conflict of deeper and uncontrolled thought was always waging. Again

he vacillated as of old between fancies and reasoned motives. He could not accustom himself to the changed conditions of his life, and he had not strength boldly to ignore them.

He had been a pauper, and now he was a prince. He was like a mendicant friar who, immediately on taking his vows, is assailed by temptations of worldly joys, ease, sloth, luxury. Renouncing the world, he had felt calm and strong; and now, when the world claims him, he feels weakly incapable of resistance.

But when he renounced, there was nothing to give up. His life was empty: now it is full to overflowing. Vague ambitions stirred in him again. Memories of his mother's words returned, with a strange and newly acquired force in their teaching. Work to be done—noble work—to give shape to all one's dreams.

Then, rising to the surface, forcing itself upward from the troubled depths and compelling him to recognize its meanness and its ugly form, there came his secret unacknowledged thought of Gladys. Once more there was remorse and pain for him, as he thought of her clearly, without self-deception. He was treating her unworthily, postponing her claims when all real cause for delay had passed. Remembering his duty to others and ostentatiously obeying its call, he had purposely put aside his duty to her. He had sent her hasty notes—a few words promising to see her soon;—but the days slipped by and he had not seen her. He was forgetting his promise and his love. Her face, her voice, were fading—something seen and heard through a cloud of tobacco smoke; a message in a song that once moved him, but a message that has lost its application and import.

There is no longer pressing need for a woman in his life—scarce room for a wife—for *any* wife. Yes, perhaps there is still place for a wife who by birth, training, and worldly knowledge, can aid him in his high work—but not poor Gladys!

When he thought of Mr. Copland, Schiller and the rest of her family, he felt a cowardly snobbish dread, of which he was ashamed even while he experienced its chilling effect. Mr. Copland would serve as cogent excuse for any baseness.

Mr. Copland in himself was sufficient to explain any vacillation. It was an immense temptation to cut oneself free from the embrace of such a father-in-law.

But this mean thought was, at the worst, transient—a temptation akin to many that attacked him, not one to which he ever feared that he would really yield. It had been lurking deep in his mind, causing strife and unrest far down beneath the surface—when once it had risen to the light of clear consciousness, it was speedily rendered innocuous.

A letter from Gladys roused him to action, and successfully swept away the last of his hesitation and doubt.

"Why don't you let me see you?" wrote Gladys, with simple directness. "You are making me more wretchedly unhappy than ever. What can I think? If something has come between us, tell me. If we are to be parted, tell me the truth. Don't leave me to guess it by your silence."

He could hear her sweet kind voice as he read the letter. He went to her; and, as soon as he was with her, the old good feelings returned; peace and strength returned. She was his real good fortune, and nothing else mattered.

Again he reproached himself bitterly for sending the color from her face and the brightness from her eyes, and again he restored her hopes and made her joyous.

"Gladys, my dearest, I have so much to tell you. It's like a fairy tale—so much has happened in such a little time."

"And you still want me? Tell me that first of all—tell me you have not grown tired of me."

Of course he still wanted her—he knew it now, if he had ever been uncertain. He told her eagerly that all his troublesome business was finished; they would be married directly, and never be separated again. As he spoke, he brought from his breast pocket the folded mandate with the large seal.

"When shall it be? To-morrow? But, Gladys, I doubt if we can use this license after all—I believe I can get a special one free—or at a reduced rate now——"

Then he related how his description in the red-bound volume must be corrected for the next edition, because strangely

and unexpectedly he had become Brentwood 6th. Earl of.

She did not wish to understand, she struggled not to believe this glorious news. She was not pleased—she was crushed, as if an avalanche of red books had slid from their shelves to bury her and her hopes for ever.

"Then you ought not to marry me now. That's what it means."

"No, it means that I shall be able to buy you all the pretty things you deserve—that we can do what we like—go where we like—that we are rich instead of being poor."

There were tears in her eyes as she quoted two lines from her favorite poet.

" 'Proudly turns he round and kindly, All of this is mine and thine!' . . . Seymour, I ought to give you up. You are the Lord of Burleigh—I know that I ought to give you up. . . . Oh, how I wish this had not happened."

She spoke of his family, of the duties of his new station, and of that hateful nonsense about marrying barmaids. She told him that he ought not to marry her; but she could not tell him that he must not do it.

He loved her for all she said to him. He thought with joy and pride that she was the only girl in London—the only girl in England who would not have been selfishly exultant on hearing his fairy tale.

"Very well," she said at last. "I will come and be your true wife as long as you want me. But the day you regret it, I shall know—and I shall leave you, and never trouble you again."

"That day will never come."

XIII

WITHIN forty-eight hours Gladys was to stand by her lover's side and receive the blessing of the church.

Her father had long since blessed her. "What, my dear, engaged again? Well, I said there were as good fish in the

sea as ever came out of it." He was preoccupied with his own affairs, boasting continually of some great Syndicate that had requested, or was about to request, his assistance. He could talk only of himself, did not require his daughter's society, and could not attend to her trivial concerns. Perhaps if he had let her now describe the gigantic size and magnificent glittering scales of the new fish that had come out of the sea for her, he might have consented to hear more.

She had obtained permission to invite him to the wedding. She tried to tell him of how this second engagement was closing. But he would not listen to her fairy tale. As soon as she began, he interrupted her.

"Tell me all about it some other time." This was in the little room behind the shop, and she had waited until Mrs. Pascall, his constant companion, went upstairs to fetch the evening whisky and water. "My luck is turning," said Mr. Copland exuberantly, and he pointed to docketted letters and papers on the table. "Big things—very big things—are opening out before me. I am on the up-grade at last. And no matter how high I rise, there'll be a place for you, my little lady. You've shared all my bad luck—and you shall have your full share of the good luck. . . . But leave me alone now, my dear."

Mrs. Pascall came down with the whisky bottle, and the glasses—one for Papa and one for herself; and Gladys left Papa with tender feelings. She would always remember this of Papa: he had promised that she should enjoy whatever good luck fell to him.

She wished for his presence at the church, but now she decided that she would not ask for it. She would tell him all in a letter—which he could read at his leisure. In any case, he would not have come to the church without his partner. This thought confirmed her decision; she would spare her lord the attendance of Mrs. Pascall.

But she must have someone with her: a bride cannot go quite alone to seek the bridegroom. There was no one except Irene whom she could beg to act as bridesmaid; and perhaps Irene would already have gone away. London, including

Bayswater, was almost empty; the August quiet had come upon lately crowded streets; cabs and railway omnibuses laden with luggage seemed to be the only traffic; everyone, old or young, who had not yet gone, was going now to make happy holiday.

And no child carrying last year's spade and pail, skipping for joy on the station platform, flying on wings of thought to the yellow sands and the blue sea—no happiest child of all the holiday makers was happier than Gladys as she thought of her holiday.

The honeymoon as planned in its original humbleness and simplicity, was to be unaltered. They would go to Yorkshire, to the little villages between the waves and the heather, and they would go incognito; they would take so much of poor-man's pleasure, if all the rest had been snatched from them.—She had pleaded for the fulfilment of the original programme, and Seymour had gladly agreed.

"But, Gladys, I have a small place up there—an old castle. I have never seen it—but I know it is pretty—from photographs—Shall we go to that?"

No, pleaded Gladys. No castles—nothing lordlike or grand; a few weeks' postponement of their greatness.

She was fortunate enough to find Miss Malcomson able and willing to be bridesmaid. Irene, with her parents, was soon departing for Homburg, and her bedroom and sitting-room were both being used for a review of hats and frocks. One might have supposed that she was about to be married, and that these extensive masses of finery had been purchased for the trousseau.

"The day after to-morrow!" said Irene, with excitement. "Yes, of course I'll come—What fun! I'm so glad it is ending so properly. Make him bring you to Homburg—but I forgot—if he is hard-up, I suppose he can't run to that."

Then Gladys told her fairy tale. If they did not go to Homburg, it would be because he did not care to go. There was nothing and nowhere that he could not run to; he was not poor; he was rich. But he had not been pretending or deceiving. He had not been a prince in disguise—but a prince

who did not know that he was a prince. And if Irene, hearing the fairy tale, did not feel some sharp pangs of envy, it was odd.

"Ber—Ber—Brentwood," she stammered. "Why, my brother Tom was only speaking of him last night. Tom knows him slightly. Tom told us the romance of his succession—Everyone is talking of it—you may well call it a fairy tale."

"We neither of us wished to be so rich."

"Oh, that's rot—utter rot," said Irene. "Money isn't everything—but if you have rank, too. O Gladys, what have you done to deserve this? Tom spoke of him as Charlton, but I never guessed—I never even thought of *your* Mr. Charlton. . . . What shall I wear at the wedding? Help me choose."

"Don't wear anything grand, please."

And Gladys explained that she was trousseau-less, that she would approach the altar rails in the dress she now wore.

"Oh, you *can't,*" cried Irene. "My dear girl, be reasonable. Let me lend you a dress—Come out with me now and let me buy you a dress. You can pay me back—with interest, if you like—when you are Lady Brentwood."

But these offers Gladys obstinately refused.

They were married at the church of St. Judith, Chelsea, without organ-music, choir, or choir-master. But the kindly sunlight shone upon them; no cruel faries came to lurk in distant shadowy pews, and to rise and claim their prince when with solemn voice the curate gave him irrevocably to Gladys; and if the bride, in her black skirt, the spotted blouse, and the hat with the pink roses, was too simply and plainly attired, the bridesmaid made up for all deficiencies by the richness and brilliancy of her costume.

Certainly if Irene had in her Homburg trousseau any finer dress than this, she would astonish the water-drinkers at the Elizabeth well and dazzle the diners on the Kurhaus terrace.

"You are wonderfully sure of yourself," she said to Gladys, as they drove in a cab to St. Judith's; and she glanced at her dowdy, shabby companion with something of contempt and something of admiration. "Is that the secret of your strength, I wonder."

"I'm not sure of myself," said Gladys. "But I think I am sure of *him.*"

And again perhaps the gorgeous Irene was stung by envious reflections.

She flashed her eyes and showed her white teeth, and rustled in silk, lace, and tulle; she swept up the nave with the grace of an empress; she stood by her friend at the chancel steps, and lowered her eyelashes to permit the bridegroom, the best man, the parson, the verger, the pew-opener to look at her; and then, raising her eyelashes, realized that not one of them had looked at her. All of them were looking at the pale-faced, trembling-lipped, shy little dowdy bride.

Then, as nobody looked at her, Irene stared with violet-tinted, coldly flashing intensity at the lordly bridegroom and his attendant squire.

The best man was sun-burnt, fair-headed, sleek, close-cropped; his clothes were made of blue serge; his tie was blue and red—those Guards colors known so well to Irene, but never by any chance seen in the Bayswater drawing-room. Quite the best of best men—easy, friendly, smiling; bloodish, modish, yet not foppish as the stockbroker swells of far-off Hebrew descent who came to the Bayswater parties; a cousin of my lord's—another lord perhaps! What had this trembling little fool ever done to deserve it all?

Then the bridesmaid studied the bridegroom,—and for a long minute was devoured by jealousy, was gnawed by burning teeth, was rent by ice-cold claws. He made his groom to seem a common lout: a humble varlet beckoned from the princely train to hold a hat or bring a footstool. He was tall, black, splendid—a prince to dream of. He was handsome beyond belief, noble of port, clothed from head to foot with dignity. He needed no mantle of state; ermine and velvet could not make him more majestic; bare-headed, he still wore the crown-invisible.

And now he took the bride's hand in his, while he repeated the pretty words of faith and promise; and the bridesmaid saw the sunlight fall upon his face, and the light inside him, come shining out to meet the sunbeams. Love shone out

of him as he put the ring on his bride's finger. He had no eyes except for his bride, he was careless of scrutiny, unconscious of bystanders—he was hand in hand with his bride, and the priest would say God was watching him. If he believed that or not, he could not be pretending *now*. There was a smile on his lips, and it told the bridesmaid the wonderful, staggering, preposterous truth: that he loved his wife, was grateful to her, was proud of her. What had she ever done to earn such a smile?

It was over—compliments, congratulations, introductions now; with chatter, signing of register, paying of fees.

"I think you know my brother," said Irene to Lord Brentwood. "Tom! Not a bad sort, is he?"

Lord Brentwood, laughing, happy, radiant, sent his best regards to Tom Malcomson, said he had known him for years, and implied that Tom was one of his dearest friends. To-day the world contained none but dearest friends.

"Gladys," said Irene, kissing the bride in a corner of the vestry. "You are the luckiest girl on earth. I don't care twopence about his rank or wealth," she added with lofty scorn. "It's the *man*. Worship him—worship him on your knees."

The happy pair drove off in one cab, and the bridesmaid and best man followed in another. It is not a long drive from Chelsea to the hotel at Knightsbridge where luncheon waited for this small bridal party, and Irene never stopped talking to her polite escort. She talked to him of marriage and of free love, of French plays and German philosophy, of mixed bathing, riding astride, the origin of matter, the conservation of energy, the water chute at the Earl's Court Exhibition, the belief in another life after death—and she rather scared him.

After luncheon she obtained possession of the bridegroom for a moment. It was time for the happy pair to be off to King's Cross, Gladys was bidding goodbye to the best man. Seymour was paying the bill and tipping the waiters, when the bridesmaid gave him her final congratulations.

"Lord Brentwood, Gladys and I were children together,"

and she clasped his hand, drawing him to her with abrupt theatrical gesture, so that his hand touched her bosom. "You have won the dearest, sweetest girl that ever lived. Guard your treasure, Lord Brentwood."

"Yes, I won't fail in that—I promise you."

"Be faithful to her," said Irene with surprising intensity, as she released his hand, after pressing it in her cold nervous fingers. "Lord Brentwood, be true to her, be gentle to her, till death parts you."

"Yes, I promised that, just now in church, you know," said Lord Brentwood, smiling happily. He was too happy to be surprised by anything this theatrical young lady could say or do.

In the hall of the hotel, when the happy pair had gone, Irene looked round for the best man—perhaps thinking that she would finish the afternoon in his pleasant company. But the best man had vanished. He was gallant and brave, worthy to wear the red and blue tie, liking to charge the savage foe and peer into the cannon's mouth; but somehow handsome Irene, with the quick-served artillery of her conversation, had scared him and made him turn tail.

"What is it?"—as Mrs. Malcomson used to say piteously. "One can't understand it—Irene contrives to frighten all young un-married men."

Week after week, the newly wedded couple lingered, now here, now there, on the wild Yorkshire coast, and every day and all day long they were peacefully, perfectly happy.

Summer lingered with them in this northern land; the corn ripened slowly to show them the yellow harvest on the moorside; the heather kept its bloom, the sea its warmth, and the earth its fragrance—to make them happier. But Messrs. Killick and Mills could not allow them to tarry for ever, a prince and princess travelling incognito, masquerading as holiday trippers, without equerry or lady-in-waiting. Business was piling up for Lord Brentwood, London required him, Mr. Killick began to clamor for him.

Up here, there was only one thing to remind him of his

greatness. He could have forgotten it altogether, but for Dykefield Castle. Mr. Killick had told him to go and look at it, and every penny-guide book also told him to do so. "Visitors," said the guide-books, "should not leave the neighborhood without seeing Dykefield Castle." Wherever he went, he was offered his castle as recreative, instructive, and interesting matter for examination. "Another excursion which the tourist should certainly take is to the grand old castle of Dykefield." Wandering from place to place, he read of it always on those printed lists of drives that hotel porters submit to new arrivals. "Short drives: Dykefield (one horse)"; "Half day drives: Dykefield (pair)"; "Whole day drives: Dykefield (19 miles, 30 shillings)." Once, when they were staying at a moorland inn near Whitby, it was so near that he could have done Dykefield for six shillings between luncheon and tea; now, it had receded from him, and yet still it stared him in the face as a duty neglected—"Dykefield: by train, one hour and fifteen minutes."

Quite at the end of his holiday, he reluctantly performed his holiday task.

The train, laboring and grunting, slowly climbed from the sea to the top of the moor, resolutely puffed across the wide tablelands, then rattled and swung down the long slopes to the plain. It swooped round curves in wooded glens, dived recklessly into rocky valleys where black-faced sheep scampered up green banks and leaped like chamois among the brown rocks and the purple heather; and by its side, all the way, a stream raced and tumbled, lashed itself to foaming rage because the train went faster, sprawled suddenly over broad shallows, and sank to sullen rest in deep pools and let the train go on without it. Then the stream appeared again, spreading at a little distance from the railway line into a river that wound among flat meadows towards a red-roofed town. And all at once Gladys saw the castle, gave a cry of pleasure, linked her hands through her husband's arm, and made him see it too.

It stood upon a mound in the middle of the plain, with the river washing its feet. The village lay huddled for protection

close to the stone walls, and from the railway station one crossed the water by a buttressed bridge, and looked up at battlements and towers. From the bridge the narrow street was as steep as a staircase, and all but the most agile tourists reached the great gate breathless.

As she passed through the frowning entrance and came into the outer court, Gladys took her husband's arm again, and pressed it in wonder and delight.

"This," she whispered, "is where I should like to live—the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

Seymour asked for the bailiff, and was glad when the guardian of the gate told them Mr. Mallock was away. He need not then announce himself; he could strictly preserve incognito, make the inspection, and fulfil his duty with very little trouble.

The gate-house dame was civil and intelligent, and answered all questions; but regretted that the gentleman and the lady would not hurry up and catch a party of tourists who had just started.

"'Tis my daughter showing them round, and she can recite the tale of the castle better than what I can. She learned it of her father in his last illness—and I never learned it—but picked it up by scraps. . . .

" . . . This is the great hall, where the meals of the lord and his folk were all taken together. Very old. Fourteenth century—except the minstrel gallery, of much later date. Look up, ma'am, at the little hole in the roof—the only chimney known in those days. The fire was in the center of the floor, where you're standing—and warriors, field hands, and herdsmen gathered round it to warm themselves. . . . My daughter could give it you a deal better than I do."

There were guard-rooms, butteries, kitchens, long galleries, a chapel—there was everything a castle should have. And it was no ruin, but a castle rain-proof, weather-tight, ready for occupation to-morrow. The bailiff's house was in the small middle court; and Gladys thought she had never seen anything quite so delightful—until, passing under an archway, they came to the garden court.

"This," said the guide, "is the quarters of the family—if they ever came here, but they don't. There's been a death in the family, you know, ma'am, and Mr. Mallock is in hope that the new lord will give us a turn one day."

It was beautiful—most beautiful—with the bright autumn flowers glowing in a long border beneath the gray stone, with the afternoon shadows falling on the smooth grass, with sundial steps, paved walks, and low parapets; on one side, the back of the chapel and the hall; on two sides, the homely red-brick house; and on the fourth side, beyond the yew trees and the terrace,—*nothing!* Wide sunlit space—white streamers of cloud floating high in blue vastness—the view of an upward-soaring bird.

"All modern—what we call the family house," said the guide. "Rebuilt in the time of Elizabeth—who was the third sovereign of the realm to sleep at Dykefield. We don't as a rule show the rooms, but—None of the ancient furniture is left. Refurnished throughout, 1851. Would you like to have a peep, ma'am?"

Gladys peeped, at dining-room, library, and two other rooms. They were comfortably but plainly furnished, and were all ready, clean, well-dusted, waiting for the family who never came.

"See that farthest yew tree," said the guide. "Well, Mr. Mallock he believes 'twas planted in Queen Elizabeth's time."

Gladys walked on the terrace, and again whispered to her husband.

"I should like to live here—I should like to die here. Bring me here if we are ever unhappy.—Send me here if I ever disgrace my Lord of Burleigh."

They mounted by winding stairs in a tower, came out upon a battlemented platform, and looked at the plain stretched as a map before them. They could trace each writhing turn of the river among the marshy meadows. Here and there fields were green and bright, and tan-colored patches showed where the yellow corn had been; but for the most part the land seemed infertile and poor. Its enemy was the river, the guide informed them—subject to heavy floods; and she pointed out

unreclaimed bogs or marshes that were apt to slide over more and more of the pasture and the crops. The treacherous quagmires and the flooding stream needed many bridles; and that was why, wherever you looked, you saw the strong dikes. One was called "Great Dyke" or "William's Dyke"—popularly supposed to have been built by William of Orange. But the guide said it was made long before then. "More likely built by William the Conqueror, I say. But whoever done it did a famous good thing, for 'tis famously built. And all other those dikes what you see are a copy, and Mr. Mallock has told me, if the family lived here, or could take any interest, he'd dike the land up to moor and win the cost ten times over for the betterment of the soil."

Certainly it could not be good land.—Seymour, dutifully obeying Mr. Killick, surveying things with the owner's eye, remembered vaguely that the whole estate—as managed by the wise Mallock—brought in only about £1,000 a year. How much was it? Eighteen or twenty thousand acres? Bad, dull-hued, sliding, trappy stuff scarcely worth measuring—but he hoped that one might trust Mr. Mallock, and not have the labor of discovering him to be a pillager and cheat. The guide, he was glad to notice, gave Mr. Mallock the highest character. Mr. Mallock had held the post of bailiff for forty years; he was just and kind; tenants respected him and were fond of him. No one ever complained about Mr. Mallock's rule.

Good or bad, the land was pretty to gaze at from castle walls. The scattered homesteads, the toy-like bridges, the threads of water, the distant slopes of the hills—all things, far and near, were lovely in the cool brightness of this October afternoon.

Gladys looked back at the castle as the train carried her away again, looked at the castle glittering bright in the distance, looked at it gleaming very very faintly—lost it and saw it once again, and then it was gone for ever.

"Seymour," she said, with a long drawn sigh, "are you quite sure it belongs to you? Sure you didn't misunderstand what somebody told you? Sure it isn't just a fancy?"

"Oh, no. It's mine—all right."

XIV

LORD and Lady Brentwood had returned to London—an important fact recorded by many newspapers,—and were staying at the Darmstadt Hotel, Brook Street.

Gladys, as a runaway but still dutiful daughter, had lost no time in summoning Mr. Copland to make the acquaintance of his son-in-law. Papa was coming to tea; and Gladys fidgeted about her grand first-floor sitting room, anxiously expecting the arrival of the visitor. She could trust her husband to be kind to Papa, but she was nervously apprehensive as to the impression Papa might produce at this first meeting. Poor brave long-struggling Papa! Anxiously waiting for him, tenderly thinking of him, she feared the effect of his shabby over-brushed clothes, of his too low bows, his excessive and obsequious deference; and, above all else, she feared his Mrs. Pascall. Would he bring Mrs. Pascall with him? If he did, first impressions must be fatally damaging to Papa.

She looked behind him rather than at him, when the sitting room door opened and the waiter announced him. He had come alone. She drew a breath of relief; and then, looking at him, could scarcely believe her eyes.

He entered the room with erect carriage and jaunty step; he was smiling, shining, self-confident; his clothes were really beautiful. It was as if the fairies had been busy with him as with her, and the wonders of his tale would surely eclipse hers—he seemed at least ten years younger than when she had left him in the dingy half-light of his shop parlor.

"My dearest Gladys," and he kissed her affectionately. "But where is the happy man?"

"He'll be here directly. Oh, Papa, I am so glad to see you."

"And so am I to see you, my pet. But what a secretive little puss she has been—devising her plots without a word to anybody—only writing to ask people's permission when it is all over."

"No, Papa, you did give your consent."

"To an engagement—not to a marriage. You sly little Gladys. Aren't you ashamed to look me in the face?"

She was not ashamed: but she could not believe her eyes; she could not believe her ears.

"Don't take my nonsense seriously," he continued, with smiling gaiety. "You are old enough to know your own mind, and I am sure you have chosen wisely. I forgive you both."

This from Papa—who used to note the import of balls and leaves in coronets as they flashed by on carriage doors, who loved the sound of titles, and who would automatically bow and rub his hands together when he spoke of noblemen whom he had once known.

Tea was brought, and she waited on the visitor; and, while he drank and munched, she watched and listened in stupefied and contented silence. The transformation of Papa was almost incredible. His naturally fresh complexion had the tints of boyhood; his light-colored hair was smooth and glossy; his eyes were extraordinarily bright, and there beamed from them happiness, hopefulness, comfortable assurance. He was like a magnificent ghost that has been given vigorous life. An hour ago she could not have recalled her earliest memory of him. But this undoubtedly was Papa at the height of his prosperity, as seen by her in the dimly remembered time of the St. John's Wood home.

"I never came across the late Lord Brentwood—but," added Papa, "I never heard anything except praise of him, or of his family—except *one* member of it. Gladys, my dear, it was a shock to me to learn the relationship to Lord Collingbourne. He was a man of whom I could not trust myself to speak. However," said Mr. Copland handsomely, *"de mortuis nil."*

Another ghost of Papa presented itself. While he consigned Lord Collingbourne to oblivion, she could see him pallid and shaky, opening and shutting his mouth, and sitting down to write his long-winded appeal for mercy. She hastily banished that ugly ghost, and concentrated her attention upon Papa's new clothes.

"Your sojourn here is of course temporary. Why, my dear, are you not yet installed at Andover House?"

"Well, I don't know if we shall ever live there."

"Of course you will live there—the sooner the better."

"My sister-in-law is there now."

"Lady Emily?"

"Yes, Papa—She has been ill, and Seymour begged her to stay and not be in a hurry about moving."

"That is very proper," said Mr. Copland. "I am glad to hear it—because it tells me that he is kind and considerate, as I hoped. But Lady Emily must not be allowed to *take root.* We cannot let Lady Emily keep you two out of your own house for ever. . . . Have you seen the Duchess yet?"

"What Duchess, Papa?"

"Your aunt, Gladys. The Duchess of Harrowmere—old Lord Brentwood's youngest sister. I read in the paper that she was in Ireland—at Clarebelton,—but I thought she might have come over to receive you."

Then Papa, making polite inquiries about his daughter's recently acquired cousins, gave evidence of the assiduous care with which he had been studying his red book.

And finally he consented to speak of himself and his bewildering metamorphosis.

"How has it all happened, Papa? Do tell me everything."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Copland, joining the tips of his fingers and then separating them in a broadly waving gesture. "A turn of fortune's wheel—How can one explain these things? Luck!"

Gradually, as he talked about himself, the old well-remembered Papa seemed to be restored. He was quite unchanged really: he displayed again the same bright-eyed enthusiasm, the same child-like craving for the miraculous, the same sanguine power of anticipation that could weave facts and fancies into one many-tinted puzzling web.

"Do you remember what I always said? I only wanted a helping hand. That hand was outstretched to me. I believed in myself—the difficulty was to get other people to believe in me. But the hour came, and, with the hour, the man—or, to be exact, the group of men—eminently substantial men, Gladys,—not men of straw."

"Oh, Papa, I do bless them."

"So now, my dear, suffice it to add that I am leaving the King's Road—for Oxford Street, where I shall open, almost immediately, very extensive premises. We are working night and day to get the very large building ready for me—and I hope soon to be in full swing—on the very largest scale."

In his excitement Mr. Copland sprang from his chair and walked about the room.

"But you must understand," he said, sitting down again and continuing calmly, "that you won't see much of me—for the present. Now that I am my own man once more, I shan't trouble anybody."

Gladys protested that she could never feel troubled by Papa.

"Well, at any rate, until you two love-birds are comfortably settled in your own nest, you don't want people bothering you. . . . But one thing! If his lordship is doing up Andover House—get me that as my first private commission. I confess I should like *that.*"

"Yes, I promise," said Gladys after a slight hesitation. "I promise to ask him—if he decides to live there, and it needs doing up."

"Of course he must live there—and of course it will require a thorough over-hauling. . . . Ah!"

The owner of Andover House was entering the room, and Mr. Copland interrupted himself and stood up.

"Seymour," said Gladys shyly. "This is Papa."

"My dear Brentwood," said Mr. Copland with the grandest possible manner. "At last I am privileged to see the audacious man who has stolen my daughter from me," and he shook the culprit warmly by the hand.

Gladys glanced at her father in pride and affection, and then turned with shy triumph to her husband, as if she would say: "Seymour, isn't he perfect? Can you help admiring him? Will you ever again be afraid of bogies?"

Indeed Lord Brentwood was agreeably surprised by the air and aspect of his father-in-law. One might have guessed from his appearance that this prosperous urbane gentleman was the

chairman of a Hospital Board, member for a suburban constituency, or what not respectable and praise-worthy.

For his part, Mr. Copland seemed quite satisfied with Lord Brentwood. The young man was friendly and complaisant; but perhaps grave beyond his years, and unduly disposed to silence. Talking for both, Mr. Copland descended somewhat from his loftiness of manner, and became rather obsequious in what was to him natural flattery. But he was not too obsequious, and on the whole he flattered most adroitly.

Before Mr. Copland left, Lord Brentwood was called to another room for an interview with a clerkly messenger from Messrs. Killick and Mills; and in his absence he received high praise.

"I am more than contented," said Mr. Copland. Then, in the moment of departure, he gave his daughter a little fatherly advice.

"As to his family, my pet:—Don't stand any nonsense from them—should you meet hauteur, in excess. Don't let them trample on you. Stare them full in the face. Knock the starch out of them at once and for ever."

Mr. Copland said this very seriously, as though, in his dealings with the aristocracy, he had always employed the method which he now described, and had always found it efficacious.

During this long delightful visit, Papa had not once mentioned Mrs. Pascall; and Gladys, beyond measure astounded, did not venture to ask after her.

Mr. Copland might well find a difficulty in explaining the nature of his luck; for it was certainly of a surprising character.

The first turn of Fortune's wheel in his favor had occurred when Sir Gregory Stuart—late of Mexico and now of Knightsbridge—happened to take Miss Edie Danvers, of histrionic, saltatory, post-card fame, for a Sunday trip in his motor-car. Spinning along the sea-coast near Eastbourne, and seeking refreshment, they came by the merest chance about tea-time to a derelict hotel.

"How d——d annoying!" said red-faced Sir Gregory. "The whole place is shut up—gone to pot. Brokers in."

Yet it was a well-constructed, attractively planned house that should have been bright and cheerful and prosperous, instead of appearing as an ugly monument of ruin to disgrace this pretty coast line.

"Bad management," said Sir Gregory, contemptuously. "Nothing else. I bet I'd make it pay."

A week after this, Sir Gregory came racing down again on his big motor—this time without the fascinating Edie; had a second look at the derelict; raced back to London; and bought the Beach-End Hotel—stock, lock, and barrel—for eleven thousand pounds.

A syndicate was almost immediately formed; and of the syndicate heavy-browed, gloomy Mr. Malcomson was a member. Two other members—friends of Malcomson—were Mr. Tilney, stockbroker, of Chapham Common, and Mr. Adams, wholesale provision merchant, of Whitehall Court.

"Now," said Sir Gregory, "we must look out for a furniture man."

A few days passed, and old Copland was invited to call upon the great Sir Gregory at his palatial Knightsbridge mansion. Sir Gregory received the visitor graciously; introduced him to Mr. Waller, a right-hand man and faithful assistant; talked to him lengthily and confidentially. He seemed to like the look of Copland.

"I think we can be useful to you," said Sir Gregory, "and *you* can be useful to us. Twiggez-vous? You know very well that in hotel enterprises the furniture man generally comes out on top. Now we don't fancy that. We want to be our own masters."

"Quite so," said Mr. Copland obsequiously. "Much more satisfactory."

"This little Beach-End Hotel is a bagatelle—only a few thousands at stake. But when I gamble, if it's only for buttons or nuts, I mean winning all the time. Besides, what I do at Beach-End on a small scale, I may do elsewhere on a large scale. . . . Now the difficulty with you is, you're down in the

mud, and we want an established man—a good going concern. Come now, is it going to cost a lot of money to put you on your legs?"

Mr. Copland gasped, and huskily replied that, with credit, extraordinarily little money would be required.

"Very good. We'll think about it. Now, do you want to ask any questions?"

Mr. Copland asked no questions.

It was mysterious, marvellous, but true. Big things *were* opening out before him—no longer an idle boast. In the splendid pastime of these rich men he was to find real solid work. What was amusement for them would provide him with a permanent place in the commercial world. He would be useful to them; and, with large-minded generosity, they were pleased that they could be useful to him.

Thenceforth, all things went smoothly for him. Money for preliminary expenses was unstintingly showered upon him. He had new clothes, new credit, new friends. A fairy had waved a wand: the scene changed, his mean and sorry outer sheath fell from him, and he stepped forth shiningly caparisoned amidst the brightest surroundings. As he told Gladys, he now belonged to the West End of the town. One must forget, as he could forget, the shabby old clothes, the shabby old shop, and the shabby old friends of the King's Road, Chelsea.

By the end of October he had opened his grand new premises; and early in November the modest little hotel company was launched.

The prospectus informed its readers that the Beach-End Hotel would supply a long-felt want—a *maison de luxe* with strictly moderate charges. The Vendor Syndicate was to receive debentures and all the ordinary shares, but not one penny in cash. Such was the confidence of the Syndicate. Six per cent cumulative preference shares to the trifling amount of fifty thousand pounds were now offered to the public. Formal notice was given to the public of all obligations, engagements, and contracts. But there appeared to be only one agreement of any importance, and that was "of the most advantageous character"—with Alfred William Copland, up-

holsterer of Oxford Street, who undertook to furnish the hotel from roof tree to cellar floor for the sum of twenty-seven thousand pounds.

XV

THERE was an Autumn session this year, and in due course "The Earl of Brentwood took the oath and subscribed the roll on succeeding to the title." He felt kindly disposed to the dignified reposeful House of Lords, and was fairly punctual in his attendances. Beyond these ceremonious legislative duties, he had many interviews with Messrs. Killick and Mills, who were slowly setting his realm in order. Soon now they would give him control, and then he would seriously begin to rule.

That, so far, was the only question he was quite sure about: he would not shirk responsibilities; he would be real governor and lord—after the style of Frederick of Prussia, living and thinking for his subjects as well as for himself.

Meanwhile—waiting to begin—he found life wonderfully pleasant, and the spending of money a most refreshing pastime. Already it was difficult to remember that a rare fifty-pound note had been a considerable sum. Now, by a stroke of the pen, he could create any number of bank notes to meet the call of the moment.

First call was buying wedding presents for his wife. He loved walking about the town with her, making her look at all the pretty things in the shop windows, and saying they must and should be hers. But Gladys was too quickly satisfied: she wanted so little, and he wished to buy so much.

"One more wedding present," he used to plead. "Something you would really like, and then I'll stop."

The jewellers' shops might have supplied a wide arena for his energy, but here again he was unfortunately frustrated. At first he understood that all the Brentwood gewgaws had been left to Lady Emily, but a stupid letter, with accompany-

ing schedule, spoiled all his sport. Lady Emily's jewels had been the property of her mother, but the family jewels and the jewels of the second Lady Brentwood were lying at the bank—"vide schedule herewith"—ready for Gladys to wear.

He took her to the bank, and examined the hoard of trinkets. The schedule seemed poor in pearls; he had decided that pearls would best become her; and he hoped still for something to do in the way of judicious pearl-buying. But when the dusty, rusty boxes were opened, even this hope faded. Items of the schedule baldly entered as 1 pearl ornament, 1 ditto, and another ditto—as you might describe a charm for the watch-guard and a pendant to a bangle—proved to be a deep collar, a long pearl chain, and a pearl and diamond tiara. He looked at them ruefully, as they gleamed at him in white lustrous splendor on their beds of stained and yellow velvet. He might possibly buy her another pearl chain; but to buy anything beyond that would be inexcusable folly.

The autumn meeting of Parliament had brought to London a strong contingent of cousins and aunts and old family friends; and, one after another, they were all invited to meet the new Lady Brentwood. Thus, one might now read, in those newspaper paragraphs of which presumably restaurant keepers are the authors, that the Darmstadt hotel was well patronized; that all vie in praising the recherché cuisine of Monsieur Nicolas, the popular manager; and that "among other parties on Monday night was a dinner given by the Earl and Countess of Brentwood, at whose table we observed the Duke and Duchess of Harrowmere, Lady Edith Burvale. the Honorable Geoffrey and Mrs. Stanby, and Colonel Edward Charlton, M.P."

What cousins and aunts said of the new Lady Brentwood before they had been included in these dinner parties may readily be imagined. They made no secret of their family grief. They openly discussed with sympathizing friends the deplorable fact that Seymour Brentwood had married a barmaid.

"I dread seeing her. The whole thing is too deplorable—but one must be civil to her, for *his* sake. Why Seymour

Brentwood, with all the world at his feet, should have done such a thing—However, I suppose he had entangled himself before he knew that it would matter so dreadfully who he did marry."

After meeting her, what they said, in different words, could be summarized as: "Might have been worse."

Seymour was profoundly weary of these small family gatherings before he completed the series of introductions. He had longed to show his bride to the family; had naively counted on the family surprise and gratification when they all saw—as they must all see—that she was a worthy mate for the family chief; had been greedy to hear their praises and congratulations. He was disappointed and mortified by an entire absence of enthusiasm.

To Gladys they were outwardly sympathetic, inwardly cold as ice. They asked her innumerable questions as to her tastes and inclinations, and with a too patent care refrained from asking questions about her past history, her previous places of abode, her friends or experience. Amiable smiling young cousins—such as Lady Edith Burvale and the Garford girls—hoped they might often see her, next year, when they all came back to London again. But they did not, old or young, tell her that she was, or try to make her, one of themselves.

"They don't like me, Seymour," she said more than once. "They'll never like me."

She had not acted upon Papa's advice—had not stared, or frowned, or announced that she would not allow them to trample on her. She had sought kindness, and endeavored to win regard.

Seymour, glancing at her across the restaurant table, had observed her pretty graceful manner as hostess. She was gracious, natural, beautiful to look at. What more could they want? Bitter resentment against his cold-hearted guests, angry scorn for the prejudices and artificiality of simpering cousins and hollow-voiced aunts, sometimes held him sternly silent. If he spoke, he would betray his disgust.

Especially the recherché repast provided by M. Nicolas on the occasion of the presence of the Duke and Duchess of

Harrowmere was dust and ashes to him, served in never-ending courses, with an almost unbearable sloth.

The Duchess, as Mr. Copland had learnt in his red-book, was the youngest sister of old Lord Brentwood. She was like her niece, Lady Emily: hook-nosed, thin, and gray. Seymour, in his guardsman days, had often stayed at Clarebelton; he was fond of his Burvale cousins, had been on brotherly affectionate terms with them. He considered his duchess-aunt a rather stupid worldly woman, but he relied on her as a staunchly well-meaning friend. The Duke was a small man, pompous and self-sufficient, as are so often small men who happen to be also thoroughly stupid. But his grace was undoubtedly well-meaning.

To-night, at the Darmstadt Hotel, the Duke gave Seymour no cause for complaint. All his annoyance and suppressed rage was induced by the Duchess.

Early in the dinner he told her that he intended to ask her a favor. He did not in the least think it a favor. He used the word only as a polite stereotype of speech, not at all as a precise embodiment of an idea. Some time next year—he continued—he would ask his aunt to take Gladys to Court, to make her necessary curtsey to the Sovereign.

"That," said the Duchess, "is a favor which I cannot refuse. It is a duty;" and she explained how she had foreseen that this request would probably be made, and had at once resolved to comply with it. "Nothing can be more natural than your asking me," she said, with quite incredible pomposity. "I should have been almost offended if you had asked anybody else."

He could not but comprehend that she truly believed she was promising to confer a considerable favor, that she stupidly supposed he attached a great value to her public recognition of Gladys, that she arrogantly imagined she would deserve sincere gratitude for condescending to throw her protecting ægis over *his* wife!

"Really," she repeated, "I should be offended if you got anyone else to do it for you."

And, pale from the effort of suppressing his indignation, Seymour determined that, if God gave him life, he would

certainly offend her. He would not now, if she knelt and prayed, permit her to make the presentation.

After dinner the Duke bored him by amiable but stupid inquiries as to his political views, and his domestic arrangements.

"You stand true to the Charlton traditions, I am glad to hear. We may reckon you as one of us?"

"Oh, yes. I'm a Liberal—by conviction, as well as birth."

"No less a person than the prime minister himself asked me about your views."

"I am honored by his curiosity," said Seymour.

"He knew your father—and he spoke with cordial feeling of the old days at Andover House. He asked me if you intended to live at Andover House."

Seymour told his inquiring uncle by marriage that he was entirely in doubt with regard to the future.

"So I gathered from your wife. You are undecided. You are looking about you, before you make up your mind. That I applaud. But you will not follow the American fashion and make your permanent home in hotels?"

"Oh, no, I don't think we shall do that."

The Duke's questions, if boring were obviously prompted by the best intentions. They were asked in the most friendly family spirit, and were free from the least assumption of any right to point one's duty or guide one's conduct. But when the guests had gone, Seymour's irritation was roused again by the discovery that the Duchess had administered interrogatories to Gladys; and that these questions had been insufferably didactic in their scheme. The Duchess also had spoken of his career; and she had upset Gladys by advising her to be very careful not to spoil it.

"Don't let me spoil your career," said Gladys forlornly. "Seymour, it's no good. They *won't* like me. They all think your marriage will be your ruin. They hate me—the Duchess hates me."

"No, she doesn't. But I hate her."

"She said you ought to take up politics seriously, and that I ought to encourage you to throw yourself into public affairs. She said I could injure you by thoughtlessness—if I only con-

sidered what I wished myself, and not what was best for you. What right has she to suppose——?"

"She has no right."

"She said there was a limit to the sacrifices a wife should demand—that you should be considered before everything. I *do* consider you. Seymour, you know I do. She said she had never put herself as an obstacle in the Duke's path, but had always pushed him on. And of course she said that just to make me feel unhappy and uncomfortable—because I was an obstacle you could never get over."

This, then, was the end of one of the dinner-parties so quaintly chronicled in Society's special columns. The hostess was thoroughly upset: at once tearfully indignant and apprehensively sad. The host—feeling as if the popular, paragraph-writing M. Nicolas had given him corked wine, stale bread, tainted fish, frozen meat, and rancid salad oil—was furiously angry with his aunt Elizabeth, and sombrely resentful against his whole family. They had disappointed him, and disgusted him.

There was, however, one member of the family who by the correctness of her attitude nearly made him forget the bad behavior of all the others. This was Lady Emily. To kind Emily the new Lady Brentwood was, from the very first, a new sister to be taken to her heart unquestioningly. She was her noble generous brother's wife: that was sufficient for Lady Emily.

The sound of the "Gladys dear," was recurrently pleasant music to Seymour's ears as Lady Emily prattled to the bride; but he was rendered uneasy by her excessive praise of himself.

"Very well," said Lady Emily, "I won't go on praising you before your face—but Gladys must come and see me quite alone. . . . And I'll get ready my wedding present, Gladys dear."

All this was on the occasion when Gladys for the first time crossed the threshold of Andover House.

The ground floor rooms were all shut up. The great triumvirate had vanished. The servants had all gone, except

the watchman, Lady Emily's maid, her invalid housekeeper, and two or three women to cook, scrub, and make beds for her ladyship. The visitors were received in the rooms on the first floor, where her ladyship had lived for so many years.

The great empty house with its shuttered windows and darkened halls seemed to Gladys most dismal and awe-inspiring. Even were one able to turn Papa loose in it and let him work his will, he could never make it bright, cheerful, homelike. It was too big, too grand, too old for alteration or improvement.

"It is so sweet of you to let me stay here," said Lady Emily. "But I shall soon be strong enough to make a move. It is cowardice and laziness that keeps me here."

On several afternoons she had driven in a four-wheeler from Carolus Street to Brook Street to call upon Gladys; and at last she brought with her in the four-wheeler her promised wedding gift. It was a parcel untidily wrapped with brown paper, and bunglingly tied about with string. Lady Emily put it on a side table in the hotel sitting-room, and for some time forgot or was too shy to speak of it. But Seymour, glancing at the parcel, readily guessed that this was the long overdue marriage offering.

By this time all the family gifts had arrived. The Duchess of Harrowmere sent a book—the very latest historical study of Mary Queen of Scots; Lady Edith Burvale sent a framed water-color drawing of Clarebelton lake and woods, by Lady Edith herself; Lady Peterhead sent another book—*Gems from our lesser Poets;* and so on. They all sent something.

"I hope you'll like them, Gladys," said Lady Emily; and with fumbling nervous fingers, she untied her parcel. "They are just back from the jewellers—who have restrung them, and put a new clasp to them."

They were pearls—the most beautiful matched pearls, in a long chain or rope, that Lady Emily shyly pulled out of their case, and hung round the neck of her new sister.

"There! I heard Seymour say something about pearls, so I do hope you'll like them. They look very pretty on you;" and she kissed Gladys. "I wanted you to have them, because

they are the prettiest things I possess; and I valued them so much myself—because they were my mother's."

Seymour was deeply touched by the kindness of his sister. But, in spite of his pleasure, he experienced sharp disappointment. If Emily could have chosen anything else instead of a pearl chain, he would have been better pleased. He had himself intended to get a pearl chain. By delay he had lost his chance: now he could not buy pearls for his wife.

What else could he give her? She wanted nothing. Costly presents overwhelmed her, seemed positively to distress her. He racked his brain to think of anything that she would receive with real satisfaction. He had set his heart on giving her one more wedding present, and he could not consent to be balked. Was there nothing that she had ever admired, or could and would admire if he obtained it for her? If he could but think of something rare and pretty that she might like, he would, after procuring it, stop present-giving, and with a contented mind pass on to other matters.

In the fog of mid November, when street lamps burned continuously, and night and day were all one, Gladys found that the hours which Seymour spent in the service of his country dragged heavily for her. She used to drive him down to Westminster, then drive back alone, disconsolately to wait in the hotel sitting-room for the sound of his footstep and the sight of his face; and in every minute until his return her spirits sank lower and lower. Companionship with him was light and life, whether the sun shone or the fog curtains hid the world: when he disappeared, loneliness, dreariness, darkness always has mastery. But she must not be selfish; she must encourage him to leave her whenever duty called him from her side; she must never forget how much he had already sacrificed for her sake.

On a particularly depressing and foggy afternoon, it happened, however, that the Lords were very kind to Gladys. They had unusually little business before them, and they despatched it with lightning celerity; and so enabled one silent, steady-voting senator to get back to his wife in time for tea.

She could hardly credit such good fortune when her heart began to beat fast with hope at the sound of his footstep. It must be an illusion, or the disturbing fact that the first floor waiter had dared to walk as walked the sixth Earl of Brentwood.

"Seymour! How delightful."

Directly after tea he was torn away from her by a wretched clerk from Messrs. Killick and Mills. The solicitors had sent him weighty parchments for signature. He sprang up, cheerfully responding to the summons, went to execute the deeds, and speedily was with her again.

"How those people trouble you," she said. "They never leave you in peace."

He stood by the fireplace, and with a smiling amused expression, looked down at her, watching her face while he talked to her.

"Gladys, do you remember Dykefield Castle?"

"Of course I do. I loved it more than anything I have ever seen."

"And do you remember how you asked me if I was sure it was mine?"

"Oh, Seymour, don't say it isn't."

She looked aghast; her eyebrows were raised in horror; her whole face spoke her nascent regret and disappointment.

"Seymour, *don't* say it isn't."

"But I do say so. It is somebody else's. . . . Gladys, it is yours."

She drew in her breath; her lips trembled; but delight shone in her eyes. Watching her face, he was more than content; his smile was joyous: he had chosen a fitting present.

"It was the only thing," he went on gaily, "that I have ever heard you admire as if it was a thing you would like for yourself—so now it is all your own."

He had of course given her the land as well as the castle—the twisting river, the bridges, the farmhouses,—from the battlements to the moor, this little realm was hers. The income that came from it was to be her pin-money, and she

might hoard it, or spend it, or give it away. But the castle and the land she was ever to hold, and never to part with.

"You must promise me that, Gladys." Resting his hands on her shoulders, and ceasing to smile, he continued in a serious voice.

"When I told the solicitors what I wanted them to do for me, they bothered me with their questions. Did I wish to give it to you as a free gift—to be yours absolutely? Or did I wish to create a trust? I told them a gift—but I thought to myself I would do both. Do you understand? It is your very own —to sell to-morrow, if you choose. But now I create the trust. I ask you to keep it, and to guard it, and never to let it slip away from you."

Then he kissed her forehead, and again smiled at her. "That's how I create the trust—without aid from Killick and Mills—because I trust you absolutely."

XVI

THE weeks glided into months, and still Seymour had done nothing to plan his life or give direction to his future.

Throughout the autumn petty honors had been showered upon him. He had been made a J.P. and a D.L., honorary Colonel of his old Yeomanry regiment, and of a volunteer corps, president of country clubs, local political associations, etc.; and now it seemed that honors usually held as more substantial were to be laid at his feet. He did not expect what was coming, and he did not recognize it as it approached nearer and nearer.

The session was over, Parliament had prorogued itself till February, and as yet Lord Brentwood's voice had not been heard. Nevertheless, if he might believe but a very little of the compliments he received, his modest silence had gained as much respect and admiration as he could ignorantly have hoped to reap from closely reasoned argument, facile and

witty rejoinders, or brilliant oratorical flights. People spoke to him as to one who—in the cant phrase—has made his mark. Venerable old lords, holders of high ornamental offices, talked to him confidentially about the programme of the next session. Cabinet Ministers, chieftains in the stormy arena of the Lower House, sought his acquaintance, and deigned to chat with him of their hopes and fears. So great and busy a man as the Patronage Secretary to the Treasury found spare minutes in which to obtain an introduction to the new Lord Brentwood, and to cultivate an amicable intercourse. But still he did not in the least suspect what was coming.

In conversation with well-trained and skilled wire-pullers, he was told many things that surprised him. Perhaps the most surprising thing to him was the continuous thought of matters outside Parliament, and the neglect or disregard of all that happened inside it. The result of a by-election was discussed with excitement; the fate of a principal measure was dismissed with a shrug, or even a yawn. Above all, it staggered one to hear graybeards chattering solemnly of the snobbish cravings of modern men and women, not as weaknesses to be deplored, but as natural phenomena to be used remorselessly.

"Socially, we are always outmatched. It is a dreadful handicap. You cannot blame people with social aspirations for seeing what they must see—what we regretfully but plainly see ourselves:—they have more to gain *socially* by throwing in their lot with the other side."

This—heard by Seymour again and again—was the dismal lament of harassed wire-pullers, including the great Sir William, who was the wire-puller-in-chief.

"What has the wife of our ordinary member to put down in her engagement book—to look forward to, and brag about, and buy a new dress for? We can't get them *all* to the State balls, can we? Why, we can't be sure," said Sir William lugubriously, "of giving them their chance of rubbing shoulders with the nobs—as they call them—three times in the course of the session. Everything goes against us socially. I said count our big houses. Liverpool House—shut up through illness. The Matlocks and the Templemores—can't open their doors.

They used to be our trump cards—really grand entertainments. We have to fall back on the moneyed classes—but that isn't the same thing—never can be the same thing . . .

"Of course we want the big names—socially as well as politically. We must show our gratitude—unstinted gratitude—for that sort of help. As I said, it is simply invaluable. If men with the big names and the big associations would sacrifice their inclination, we should not be so dependent on men like our estimable host—to keep us together."

Then, for the first time, Seymour guessed what was coming. This particular conversationalist was but a delicately contrived instrument for the carrying of a distant voice to favored ears. All this talk was inspired; not a word of it was random after-dinner chatter; every word of it was full of settled intention. The new Lord Brentwood was being carefully sounded by a trusted agent.

And just after Christmas it came—gratifying overture, with subsequent invitation to join the Government on the very earliest opportunity. It was at once a flattering offer and a plain bargain, to be accepted or refused. Deprived of decorative phrase, pulled out of its shrouding ambiguities, and set forth in common business-like language, it amounted to this: Open Andover House for us as a Party stronghold, and we will make you Under Secretary. Keep it open, and we promise you a seat in the Cabinet within three years—bar accidents—and sooner, perhaps. We can do this on the name and the house.

He thought he would refuse. At first he was sure that he would not accept. There was no immediate hurry for a definite answer; ample time for deliberation had been allowed. Gladys was truly appalled by the prospect before her. She hated the idea of life at Andover House, she dreaded her task as mistress of a Party stronghold. The invitation from the Government was a death stroke to many secret fondly cherished hopes or dreams of the happy and unfettered life that she and her loved companion might so easily enjoy. Nevertheless, she urged Seymour to take office. Fate, she believed, had promptly

tested her loyalty. She must show now that she could stifle selfish yearnings. Here was a point in her husband's career—as the didactic Duchess of Harrowmere would doubtless have reminded her—where many side turnings presented themselves. It was her duty to push the wayfarer forward along the straight path, and disregard tempting sign-boards with legends that seemed to say: This leads to domestic tranquillity; To the right for quiet comfort; To the left for blue skies, far-off lands, and perpetual honeymoons.

"Do you mean, Gladys, that you think I ought to accept?"

"Yes. I am proud to think they have done you this honor. It *is* a great honor."

"Well, I don't know about that. No, I don't think it is, really."

"But you will accept it? You intend to accept it, don't you?"

"I can't make up my mind."

Gradually he felt drawn through the zone of indecision that lay between an instinctive No and a well-considered Yes. Lying late in bed on these dark winter mornings, he could think clearly, if lazily, after the long night's sleep. Time to get up—most certainly time to be up and stirring. That, perhaps, defined his situation with regard to the hour and the days and years of his life. He must do something. Then why not do this, which blind chance and the enlightened leaders of a great Party had put before him as what he ought to do?

With quickening imagination he could see Gladys filling her allotted place in the projected life-scheme. He could see her at the top of her staircase, in pearl chains and diamond tiara, receiving her innumerable guests; he could see her, in large hats and ermine stoles, opening bazaars, giving away prizes or shooting first shots on miniature rifle ranges—in a word, helping him and his superior officers to keep the Party together. She would do it all admirably, and the world admiring would be forced to acknowledge that never had minister a better, more suitable, and desirable wife.

After some delay, he said Yes to the wire-pulling envoys who had approached him; and immediately the fact became an open secret. That was the phrase used in many news-

paper paragraphs. "It is now an open secret that office will shortly be offered to a peer who, by name and family traditions, apart from personal merit, may be said almost to possess an hereditary right to a place in any Liberal Government. We allude to the Earl of Brentwood, the grandson of that famous statesman who . . . " Congratulatory letters poured in upon him; cousins and aunts all wrote to say they hoped the good news was true. He was stimulated to energy and action. The hour had arrived: his work lay before him.

He went to Killick and Mills, and handed back to them all that they had so far handed to him, begged them to keep in hand all that they were intending to hand over. He went to Lady Emily, and told her that he was really intending to live at Andover House, and that he wanted to begin setting the neglected mansion in habitable condition.

Lady Emily said she would go at once.

"It is laziness and dread of trouble that has kept me here. But now I will get my things together, and make the dreaded move. I have practically taken a flat in Hill Street—quite close, dear Seymour."

Lady Emily was, she said, delighted to think that the dear old house would soon be in full swing as in the dear old days.

"But are you going to make many alterations?" she asked plaintively. "I do so love it as it is, and I can't bear to think of its being much altered."

"Oh, no," said Seymour. "I only mean to get it put in order—fresh paint and that sort of thing."

His wife asked him later if he had issued any orders to tradesmen or workmen. Had he any particular house-decorator whom he wished to employ?

"No, I must think about that."

And timidly she preferred her request that he would give the job to Papa—or permit Papa to tender an estimate for the work with other tradesmen.

To her delight, the idea of employing Papa was received without demur, indeed with satisfaction.

"Would he do it for us, Gladys? Are you sure he would care about it?"

Gladys was quite sure.

"Then ask him to come to see the house at once. It really is a splendid suggestion. It will save all trouble—yes, arrange with Mr. Copland."

Gladys hastened to the grand new shop in Oxford Street, and, herself delighted, soon delighted Papa also with a report of her success.

Mr. Copland, forgetting his shop manner, kissed her and praised her; rubbed his hands and snapped his fingers; then drew her by the arm within his glass-screened bureaux.

"I am so well ahead with my large contracts that I can devote myself *con amore* to this large—very large private job. I'll be worthy of your confidence. I'll do you credit—and do myself credit too. Look at these sketches;" and Mr. Copland turned the pages of an album that contained designs in water-color.

"Mr. Goring, where are those wall-papers from Eldridge and Co.? Miss Vincent, where is Eldridge's book? My dear, you must allow me to present Miss Vincent. Miss Vincent, Lady Brentwood."

Papa seemed to be on very friendly terms with the russet-haired young lady, who left her type-writing machine and bowed shyly when this introduction was made.

"Run and find those new papers for me, Miss Vincent," and Mr. Copland with an approving smile watched his slim assistant hurry off to obey him. "Miss Vincent," he said confidentially, "is my right hand. Really, that girl is so *teachable* that I rely on her as my right hand."

But where was his old right hand? What had befallen Mrs. Pascall? No slightest sign of her on either side of the glass screens!

Driving away, she could not avoid the reflection that Papa had been very cruel to his faithful and confiding partner. She had always considered Mrs. Pascall a danger; but, now that the danger was removed, she felt sorry for the poor soul. Instinctively comprehending the close bonds that united the partners, while refusing to recognize or acknowledge their closeness, she had always recoiled from this blowzy over-kind

lady, as from the unworthy substitute come to fill an empty place—her mother's. Since her marriage, she had dreaded the day when she would be obliged to tell her husband that Papa was no longer wife-less. Now when she knew that she would never be called upon to make the announcement—at least, with regard to Mrs. Pascall,—she felt sad and sorry. Mrs. Pascall *ought* to have been her stepmother.

This was the saddest, longest, most lonely evening that the young Lady Brentwood had yet spent. Lord Brentwood was dining at the Reform Club with political commanders,—a gathering of which it would be impossible to exaggerate the weight, influence, and distinguished talents. Lady Brentwood was sitting by the hotel hearth, sadly looking into the fire, sadly looking into her own heart.

Perhaps merely depressed by the slightly delicate state of her health, she brooded in a sadness that grew deeper every hour. She had thought of an early discovered and cruel law of life. You cannot help those you love. She has much money, but she can do nothing with it—except give it blindly to strangers. She cannot help her sister and her brothers. Neither Alfred, nor Pelham, nor Nathalie can or will be helped. Schiller does not even answer letters. It is impossible to help her husband. She helped Seymour once—just at first, when he himself was sad and lonely. But now he has passed out of reach—or is passing. And she thought of her last discovered and most cruel law. We dread that we shall lose those we love in death, and we learn that we must lose them in life.

XVII

ANDOVER HOUSE was soon in the possession of its owner's father-in-law. A white and gold board above the classic porch had been set up like a gigantic visiting card, for all Mayfair to see who had come to Carolus Street and there was making himself at home—A. W. Copland, House furnisher, decorator, contractor, etc. Workmen passed in and

out of the open doors; in the street one's teeth were set on edge by the horrible noise of steel scraping the soot and dirt from the dark old stones; in the empty hall planks falling upon planks made hollow echoing thunders, white clouds of dust rose, the odor of burning paint sickened one.

Every day the noise and dust increased; and yet, in the midst of this chaos and turmoil, Lady Emily was still camping upstairs on the first floor.

"I believe," said Mr. Copland, "that she has fairly taken root."

He did not say this to her host and brother. From the moment of securing a trade order, he assumed a most obsequious tradesman-like manner to his son-in-law. It seemed to be a point of professional etiquette to forget that he was connected with the employer in any way but that of pure business. No friendliness exhibited by Seymour could thaw this reserve, or remove the obsequious habit. Mr. Copland could not now get through the shortest sentence without saying My lord or Your lordship to his daughter's husband. So, when Seymour had himself spoken of Lady Emily, Mr. Copland bowed low, rubbed his hands, and said, "Certainly, my lord. We will take every precaution not to molest or annoy her ladyship. We shall study her convenience—and the convenience of her servants."

"She will be going in a few days now," said Seymour, "and I don't want her to feel bustled out of the house by the workmen."

"Your lordship may leave that to me."

The difficult task which now must absorb Lord Brentwood's attention was the gathering together of a household.

Suddenly a thought came which really seemed a brilliant inspiration, whereby he might relieve himself of the whole difficulty. There was one man in London who could render all the assistance he needed. Mr. Marlow of St. James's Place, ex-footman and now caterer and lodging-house keeper, could and would infallibly attend to these tiresome details.

In assisting the higher circles of the social world there was nothing that Marlow was not capable of undertaking.

As letter of furnished apartments, he was useful to wealthy and noble bachelors; as manager of grand parties, he was useful to them as soon as they had settled down with wealthy or noble brides. Marlow would do you a party by contract in its entireness, from the unrolling of a carpet on the front, steps to the last whisky-and-soda drunk, after the fete was over, by a weary but contented host. And next morning, when you came down to breakfast, not a trace of the party would meet your eyes. Marlow and his myrmidons would have reinstated your quiet house as it was ere they touched it. You might believe that your lavish hospitality, your string band, your flower-decked unrecognizable rooms, your buffets, bowers, doorless thresholds, lamp-lit blocks of ice, and quails, cutlets and asparagus served at separate tables for four and eight—that all this munificently unwonted splendor was a conceited dream. So little trouble had Marlow given, that really you might continue to believe the party was a dream, until the post brought Marlow's bill. If the party extended over a week and included the hire of a house for it—say an Ascot party for the race week,—he would undertake the job and carry it through triumphantly. If the party was so small a thing as the provision of a picnic luncheon at the end of a motor ride, he seemed overjoyed by obtaining the order, and never failed successfully to fulfil it. When you reached the appointed spot—among the gorse on the Hog's Back or in some wooded dell by the upper Thames—there, waiting for you at the appointed hour, were two of Marlow's men, trestle table, folding chairs, waterproof carpet, piled boxes, glass, napery, hot dishes, cold dishes, fruit, flowers, wines, coffee, and liqueurs,—and quite possibly the great Mr. Marlow himself, come down from London by express train to see that the salt had not been forgotten.

He knew everybody in polite society. At his parties he always announced the guests; and the butlers whom he superseded for the evening were glad to stand by and admire, wondering how Mr. Marlow contrived to reel off the names and titles without trip or slip, and glad safely to evade the horrid mess they would have made of such announcements as

His Excellency Erzroum Sirampur or the Marquis and Marchioness de las Cuevas del Mego-Mecerro.

In some other respects Marlow was uniquely useful to the nobility and richest gentry. It was said that he would act, and did often act, as discreet messenger, or even as secret ambassador, between gentlemen of society and ladies of the half world.

Thinking and inventing for the employer, Mr. Marlow made, in the blank wall of the side street, a private door which gave entrance to a flagged passage of the basement, from which one mounted by a stone staircase to the rooms on the ground floor that formerly had been the sitting-rooms of Messrs. Latham, Veale, and Schuman. These rooms he now devoted to the private use of the head of the house, and described them as his lordship's working cabinet, reception-room, and anteroom. Only the innermost of the three apartments communicated with the ground floor and the real reception-rooms; and here, behind the library, he contrived double doors, to admit his lordship but to shut out all sounds from the house.

Marlow, politely insisting on these thoughtful arrangements, instructed Copland how to furnish the three rooms. Severe dignity was to be the keynote. There should be a massive dining table in the middle room, thick carpet on the stone stairs, mosaic of india-rubber paving the passage; and the outer door down below must be heavy, moving without sound, shutting hermetically. Its lock must be easy of manipulation, and there must be no bell of any sort outside.

"I would suggest," said Mr. Marlow, showing Lord Brentwood his working cabinet, "the inexpediency of fitting a telephone in here. This, my lord, is your sanctum sanctorum —your retreat, where no one has the right to disturb you. Bells of course may be fixed from here to the offices, so that you can ring for a house servant if you require to do so. But communication in the other direction, *from* the house, should be completely cut off—to ensure absolute quiet."

And he further expounded the uses and value of such a retreat. One could receive visitors, letting them in and out as and when one pleased, and "nobody would be any the

wiser." One could give supper parties to artists, singers, actors, and so forth—who would not probably be on the house guest-list. He, Marlow, could supply a dinner or a supper here, bringing it in from outside and not interfering with or burdening the service of the house.

Seymour, well knowing Marlow's little ways, and perhaps detecting sinister meaning in his fair words, rather sternly objected to all this provision for his convenience.

But Marlow at once became very lofty in purpose.

"I borrowed it all, my lord," he explained, "or rather took the idea from Lord——," and he named a famous and respected ex-cabinet minister. "His lordship, I believe, borrowed it from the embassies—in Paris. What the French call *une porte dérobée,*" added Marlow, with a faultless accent— and then he launched into really eloquent flattery. "His lordship found the greatest comfort in it—for affairs of state, when secrecy was indispensable. And if I may say so, my lord, we all look to see you at the top of the tree. Suppose that, like his lordship, you are Foreign Secretary. It may be vital to your lordship to see people easily and privately. This door may be used by the Ambassadors of the great powers. Peace or war may be decided in that room, while your servants are sleeping in their beds and you sit here with three or four bigwigs that no one—not a soul in the house—has seen come in or will see go out."

Lord Brentwood did not enjoy this sort of flattering care, and yet he submitted to it.

The gathering of suitable servants was, as Marlow modestly said, merely child's play; but he was proud of the simplicity and effectiveness of his domestic scheme. For the secretorial department, above the ordinary staff, he installed a Mr. Roberts, late of Harrow and Balliol, who was very much the gentleman; Mr. Philpott, a proficient clerk, who was an undiluted cockney; and Miss North, versed in shorthand and type-writing, who was a nondescript young woman of uncertain age. Miss North was not a permanent official. She was to come for a few hours in the morning, whenever she was wanted.

All these arrangements naturally demanded considerable

time, and Mr. Copland was unfortunate enough on more than one occasion to incur his employer's serious displeasure. Notably so, by an imprudence committed in excess of zeal.

Lady Emily had signed the agreement for her flat in Hill Street; her health was completely restored; but still she lingered, camping among the painters, plumbers, and carpenters. "She is stopping all the work," said Mr. Copland, "and I don't believe she ever will move—unless we give her the push to start her." Then, when Lady Emily was out driving in her four-wheeler one afternoon, he most indiscreetly told the workmen to attack her boudoir. Lady Emily, after a short drive, found her furniture stacked in the corridor, her china, nicknacks, books and papers, cherished photographs and mementos piled on chairs and inadequately draped with paint-stained sheets. The boudoir walls were already stripped; the carpet had been ruthlessly pulled up; the room was full of impious vulgar men: her little camp had been rushed by the savages.

Lady Emily was furiously angry. The Charlton blood flamed in her cheeks, and her weak eyes flashed fire; she, the meekest of creatures, for a few moments raged against the monstrous indignity to which she had been subjected.

"By Mr. Copland's orders," said the workmen, apologetically. "Mr. Copland's express orders—to set to at once."

Lady Emily, rapidly passing from anger to tears, summoned her attendants, packed, and withdrew that night from her father's house. Mr. Copland's outrage had undoubtedly achieved its object, but at a dreadful cost. Seymour, who hastened to his sister, now camping forlornly in her new home, experienced the utmost difficulty in consoling her and reinstating himself in her good opinion.

"Say no more, Seymour. I outstayed my welcome. But I trusted to your kind words. I never believed that—even if I was troublesome to you—it could come to this. I thought, at least you would tell me yourself—and not allow your servants to cast me out."

When at last he had salved Lady Emily's wounded feelings, he rebuked Mr. Copland with a severity that he afterwards regretted.

"I admit I went too far, my lord," said Mr. Copland—"owing to inadvertence,—and I humbly beg pardon of Lady Emily. Nothing could have been further from my thoughts than to cause annoyance to her. I perfectly remember your lordship's instructions that she was not to be molested—on any pretext. Most unfortunate thing to have occurred."

After this zealous indiscretion and the rebuke that it evoked, Mr. Copland became even more painfully sycophantic in manner than hitherto. It seemed that he could not bow low enough, or rest assured that he had said My lord sufficiently often. He irritated Seymour more than once by speaking of Gladys as "her ladyship." He was determined now to make it plain that he gave her due rank as his employer's wife, and that he would never take liberties because she happened also to be his own daughter.

Finally, house and household were declared to be ready; but long before this happy declaration Seymour had grown desperately tired of the sight of his experts and the sound of their flattering voices. February had nearly turned into March when the Darmstadt Hotel lost its two best customers, and it was widely reported as "fashionable intelligence" that Lord and Lady Brentwood were established in their own house.

XVIII

SEYMOUR was now the busiest of men. Parliament had reassembled; it was incumbent upon him to be in his place at every sitting of the Lords; two or three times he had been put up to speak as a recognized, and shortly to be authorized, supporter of the Government.

Outside of his legislative duties he must not look for freedom. Each hour of the day was handsomely filled for him. He had not a spare five minutes for recreative reading, idle musing, or steady thinking. So busy was he that every day was a race against time, and there were days on which he felt like a race-horse carrying too much weight. He had vowed to himself,

when he rose in the morning, that ere night fell he would have his hair cut; and he lay down unshorn, defeated—simply beaten by time.

Then, at Easter, came the verification of surprisingly accurate newspaper forecasts—two worn-out but tenacious veterans ruthlessly torn from power, kicked upstairs, forced to hide their diminished heads in unsolicited coronets; two brilliant pushful insatiably ambitious lads, aged forty-three and forty-seven respectively, accommodated with seats at the cabinet table; and, "as we predicted so long ago as the beginning of last January," appointed Lord Brentwood as Under Secretary "for the office which more than any other may have to bear the brunt of opposition criticism in the upper chamber."

Immediately after the recess Seymour took his seat on the front bench to the right of the woolsack, by the side of all the lordly members of the Government. If busy before, he was now, impossible as it appeared, still busier than ever.

In truth, the world had claimed him. Hence onward, whether conscious of the fact or not, he was lost among the futilities. Like an ant, he was carrying his self-imposed burdens: amid struggling rubbish-collecting ants, slowly burying himself so that the light should reach him no more. Once, for a little while, he had stood alone and felt the full strong light upon him and all round him. Then, thinking clearly, he had made his famous renunciation. Now the renunciation was forgotten, and all the stages of thought that led him to it were obliterated. He could not think now—he had no time. But he was not happy—vague restless longings haunted him. He suffered the discontent that falls on men and women who are acting life, and not really living it. And always now, hence onward, he felt an irritable resentment against all that seemed to balk him in the futile aim of the passing moment—even against his wife.

The first social failure of Lady Brentwood was in the nature of a domestic success. Her slight ill health did not—could not—pass off without causing a certain amount of trouble.

"Lady Brentwood,"—said Fashionable Intelligence—"who

is not very strong just now, has been staying during the past fortnight at the new and luxurious hotel at Beach-End-on-Sea." Lady Brentwood—as all fashionably intelligent readers might comprehend—had expectations of being a mother before she became quite strong again. Lady Brentwood, therefore, was not able to act her part as hostess of the Party stronghold.

But Lord Brentwood must fulfil his bargain. Since his wife could not bear the fatigue of standing half the night at the top of his grand staircase, he must borrow a hostess to occupy this proud position. Between the Whitsuntide and August Bank holidays there were three large receptions at Andover House, and an ample series of men's dinners. The Duchess of Harrowmere was kind enough to offer herself as deputy hostess, but Seymour promptly declined to accept this favor from his aunt. "It strikes me," said her grace, "as the proper and natural arrangement, and I am very willing to do it for you." Seymour took pleasure in the thought that his pompous patronizing aunt was not only very willing, but very eager to be thus employed. "I wish you would let me assist you," she wrote, pleading that he would reconsider his refusal. "I cannot think why you decline my offer. Everybody will naturally expect to see me helping you, as your wife cannot appear." He was truly pleased to believe that Aunt Elizabeth suffered mortification and disappointment. To his dying day, he would never forgive her for her impertinent tone and absurdly condescending words at the round table of the Darmstadt Restaurant.

His borrowed hostess was Lady Emily. Persuasion and argument were called for before she would take so conspicuous a post, but it was plain at once that she wanted to say yes. She was gratified and pleasantly flattered by the suggestion. This compliment served, indeed, entirely to remove some lingering and painful memories of the abrupt manner in which she had been swept out of Andover House.

"O Seymour—do you think I *ought* to. So soon, you know —within a year of my poor darling's death. But it is for the good of the cause. You are obliged to entertain. And it is

sweet of you to ask me, Seymour dear. And does dear Gladys desire it?"

In due course, then, Lady Emily received the slowly mounting guests at her brother's first opening of the stronghold. It was as if the grand old days had returned, and something of her vanished youth with them. She felt proud and strong, and knew no fatigue in the good cause.

The grandest dinner was the one given in honor of the Sovereign's birthday. As guest of the evening a somewhat insignificant prince was allotted to Andover House, for the gratification of the Departmental Officials and M.P.'s who made up the bulk of the numerous company. More illustrious princes had been allotted to the Birthday dinners of Secretaries of State. But Seymour's prince was a handsome allotment for any Under Secretary, and he gave the utmost satisfaction to the heads of departments and the sturdy democrats who, each in turn, were presented to him.

At the reception which followed the dinner, wives of members enjoyed full sight of Seymour's prince; and the leaders of the Party, making their rounds, nearly all climbed the staircase, and penetrated the rooms now crowded with a loyal and contented rank and file. Party leaders and their perspiring wire-pullers, who struggled through the assembled mob to inspect this particular Birthday reception, probably agreed that Seymour was keeping his bargain in a noble spirit.

The entertainments—thanks to Marlow—were undoubtedly a success, but the host was sometimes secretly bored by them. He liked the praise and the sense of weight and power, but he disliked the rapidly repeated trouble and fatigue. He found the men's dinners to be more trying than the crowded routs, and his initial series of hospitalities altogether seemed to him well-nigh interminable. It was the absence of his wife, he told himself, that made his task so afflictively arduous.

Heavy foods, many wines, a mercilessly protracted banquet —for the good of the Party it seemed that one could not get too much to eat, or sit too long at table. Thirty-five men, gathered together by his polite request and gravely thanked for coming—and sometimes not a man of the thirty-five that he

ever wanted to see again! One warm June night he looked at his guests with a lack-lustre eye, idly counting them and considering them. The famous wire-pulling Sir William was there, to whisper in his ear presently that this sort of thing is invaluable—really invaluable. The Duke of Harrowmere was there—asked because he was a duke, and for no other reason. These vulgarians like to meet a duke. Another guest was the editor of a Party newspaper—a most supercilious ass, who would speak of nothing but politics. Another guest was a man now held in high favor by the Party. This was red-faced Sir Gregory Stuart, who had come forward to contest a stoutly conservative division of a Southern county; and who had, without doubt, spent money freely in nursing the constituency. All the thirty-five had been invited for the good of the Party—except one. Among all his guests, there was to-night only one whom the host had himself wished to feast; and this gentleman, strangely enough, was Mr. A. W. Copland.

He had spoken disrespectfully of his father-in-law—very irritably and unkindly,—and had wounded his wife by his ill-considered words. Poor Gladys wept, and for a day or two showed how sharp a wound he had given her. Then, as a happy idea, he invited Copland to the dinner. He did not mention the invitation until after it had been accepted; and then he alluded to the fact with an affectation of carelessness, as though it was the most natural thing in the world. "By the way, did I tell you that your father is able to join us to-morrow?" The cloud was at once dissipated; strained relations came to an end: Gladys was delightedly grateful. "Oh, Seymour, how sweet of you to find room for him. He will so love it. Oh, this *is* kind of you."

Mr. Copland thoroughly enjoyed himself; but to Seymour he proved almost insupportable. He was present, as the newspapers say, "in the capacity of an invited guest," and he threw off completely his tradesman-manner.

He had lost his generous employer, but to-night he had recovered his dear son-in-law. He expanded with smiling contentment, made himself really at home—if for one night only. "My dear Brentwood, did you grow these peaches your-

self? If so, I must congratulate you on your gardeners. Sir Gregory, look at these peaches. You didn't have finer fruit in Mexico."

He talked too much; and Seymour, who had been angry with him for his ridiculous My lords and Your lordships, felt something of a shock from the My dear Brentwoods now freely fired at him across the long range of gilt fruit dishes. Everybody noticed Mr. Copland: he drew far too much attention.

After dinner he was quite irrepressible. He button-holed the Duke of Harrowmere, pulled the supercilious editor by the arm, and told them both a long story about the French Exhibition of 1879, and the pavilion in which he had displayed his model furniture. Acting like an unauthorized master of the ceremonies, he introduced everybody to Sir Gregory Stuart as "a man of the hour, a striking personality, and my very good friend." He seemed to have transferred to Sir Gregory all the sycophantic subservience that he previously held at the disposal of Seymour. He encouraged and egged on Sir Gregory to show himself as a self-made man, and to prove conclusively that he had not made himself after any conventionally elegant pattern.

"Brentwood, my dear fellow, come and listen to Sir Gregory. Sir Gregory is relating some of his early adventures."

Sir Gregory, flattered and encouraged in this manner, talked long and loudly. Soon Sir Gregory and his admiring friend Mr. Copland were the only people talking in a large group of men.

Till the guests left, Seymour's irritation was steadily increasing. Wherever he moved, he could hear Mr. Copland's voice. Once, when Sir Gregory had made a joke or had intended to make a joke, Mr. Copland clapped his hands to applaud the sally. The Duke of Harrowmere stared in stupid wonder; other people were startled, and turned with surprise to see whence the unexpected noise had come. It seemed then to Seymour that Mr. Copland, in his tradesman capacity or in his capacity of invited guest, was alike utterly impossible. What could one do with such a father-in-law? He regretted his kindness; he thought he had been an idiot in asking Mr. Copland to dinner; and his irritation became so strong that he

decided to tell Gladys he could not and would not again be bothered with Mr. Copland.

But when, after all the guests had gone, he went to his wife's room, he somehow contrived to gulp down his wrath and disgust. Gladys was so humbly grateful for his kindness, so affectionately anxious to hear that Papa had acquitted himself well.

"It was all right, wasn't it? Papa was nice?"

Looking at her trustful eyes, feeling her hands pressing his, he could not stab her again by the cruel words that should pronounce Papa's doom.

"Did he talk much?"

"Yes," said Seymour with a gulp, "he talked a great deal."

"Oh, I'm so glad. Because that means he was really enjoying it. He always talks a lot when he is happy."

"Oh, yes, I feel sure your father enjoyed it. He said so himself—two or three times."

So Gladys was permitted to fall asleep joyous in the thought that Papa had been very nice, and had even achieved some slight social success as a chatty companionable dinner guest. Lord Brentwood kissed his wife and bade her good-night. He had somehow, for her sake, swallowed his irritation.

And that was incomparably the best and most substantial thing done by Lord Brentwood on this long futile day.

During these late summer months he was almost perfect as a husband. He was with his wife whenever he could find time, and he never forgot the tenderness and forbearance especially due to a wife in her condition. Already he had learnt by experience that she possessed a pride of her own, and that it could very easily be wounded. Already, before they had been married a full year, there had been sharp disagreements, brief estrangements, and an occasional coldness that could be melted only by her tears. She was so gentle and yielding; and yet, if she fancied she met injustice or unkindness, she showed a strength of resistance that surprised and angered him. She would suffer anything for love, but she had failed more than once in the implicit unreasoning obedience which he believed he had a

right to command. One dispute arose from her persistence in seeking out old and undesirable friends. She had visited her bridesmaid, and refused to drop this most undesirable acquaintance. She had known Miss Malcomson all her life: she must be loyal to her ancient comrades.

"You must be loyal to me," he said fretfully. "You must help me—not make things difficult for me."

Then her pride rose, and there was no holding her. Anger, resentment, coldness, were the stages they passed through before they could be reconciled, and oblivion be granted for the rebellious and forbidden visit to Miss Irene in the Bayswater Road.

But now all these trifling squabbles were forgotten. Care for his wife's health, anxious devices for her comfort and security, absorbed him—whenever his engagements allowed him to be with her.

He longed for the birth of the child, to feel assurance that all danger was past, and to get back his wife as a true companion. Sometimes he thought of how completely this natural and desired event had upset his plans. He had wanted the thing to happen; but not in this way—he had not been prepared for it now, at once. It had taken her from his side just when he counted on her aid and support. He had no bad thoughts, not one regret that he could analyze as selfish or unnatural; but it seemed to him that in this, as in everything else, he had been the plaything of fate.

If he had known earlier, he might have shaped his course differently. Had he known, he might not perhaps have joined the Government. If she had told him, he might have struck another bargain, stipulating for a year's delay before he opened his stronghold. But no, she waited until he had committed himself, and only then—a day after he formed and announced his decision,—she first whispered her hope.

The baby—a son and heir, a new and innocent Lord Collingbourne—was born in August, very soon after Parliament rose. While happy crowds of holiday-makers were hurrying from the town, danger and fear made a heavy breathless atmosphere

in the wide corridors and lofty rooms of Andover House. Wisest doctors, most skilled of nurses, everything that money can buy, were here to help Lady Brentwood through her trial; but it would have been better perhaps for the mother and child, if they could have exchanged the luxury of this London palace for a humble cottage in the fresh cool air that blows over open fields. Seymour at first reproached himself, because he had not turned his back on the Nation's business and carried his wife far away into the country. Wise doctors assured him, however, that London, even in August, is as good a place as any other.

There was just time for the awakening of his parental feelings; and then came bitter disappointment. Athough something of a poet, and imaginative enough, he needed the fact to stimulate his thought. But with the sound of the infant's cry, and the sight of his child lying in his wife's arms—above all, with his fears for the mother's safety almost passed,—he could realize the force of those instinctive yearnings that had been satisfied by the creation of the fragile little life. Three weeks were given him for the strong growth of a father's pride; and then the cause of it was gone.

Gladys felt that her heart had been buried with the child. In her agony of grief she wished to die. Wise doctors shook their heads ominously. A stout fight for life seems necessary; and unhappily our patient is allying herself to the enemy. In the case before us, we have youth, a sound constitution; and yet we find sudden, almost wilful collapse.

She was desperately ill for a month, very slowly recovering for two more months. The fogs of November had come back again before it was possible to move her. Lady Emily, throughout this weary convalescence, was a kind and faithful sister. She was constant in her attendance on the patient, would sit through the longest day at the patient's bedside, and resolutely refused to leave London until the patient could go herself.

"Take me away." This was the patient's cry to her kind sister, and to her husband. "Take me away. Don't listen to the doctors. If I am to live, take me away."

It was dreadful to be compelled to refuse, and day after day to answer the cry with the same words.

"Yes—get well—gain only a little more strength, and you shall go."

She used to burst into wild sobbing, cling convulsively with her weak arms, and implore her husband to disobey the doctor's orders and shut his ears to their heavy warnings.

"Seymour, take me away from this unlucky house. It is a fatal house to me. It is a tomb. It is the tomb of all my hope, and all my love. Have pity on me and take me away from it."

Then she lay exhausted, white, trembling, almost lifeless.

"Seymour, are you there still?" And she would take his hand, and sometimes feebly draw it to her lips. "Don't listen to what I say. I didn't mean what I said. I'll never say it again. You are so good—so very good to me. I'll do anything you tell me."

XIX

ANOTHER season had begun; Parliament had once more reassembled after an Easter recess; London was rapidly filling itself with its usual summer crowds.

Gladys attended the first Court of the year—presented by the wife of a Party-leader, and not by her aunt, the Duchess of Harrowmere,—and now she was going into general society with her husband. She looked care-worn and pale—not nearly so pretty as last year, when nobody saw her. Seymour, glancing at her across his friends' dinner tables, noticed this deterioration, and remembered the brightness of her eyes, her friendly gracious smiles, and her happy cheerful manner eighteen months ago, when, at the Darmstadt Hotel, she welcomed his stupid relations. He had done all he could for her; but she seemed quite unable to get over the loss of her baby. Change of air and change of scene—quiet months at Collingbourne Court, a second visit to Beach-End, a rapid journey to the South of

France,—all that money and care had provided for her, failed to restore perfect equanimity. Grief, or the memory of grief, still was betrayed by pallid cheeks, sad eyes, and languid voice.

Once he told her that the time had come when she really must make an effort. It was her duty to cheer up and throw off vain regrets.

"Yes," she said humbly. "I'll try to be gay—I'll try to forget—for your sake."

The season's entertainments were in preparation, or under discussion, at Andover House. The great evening receptions were not due yet: it was too early even to fix dates for them. But the series of banquets must start, and this year, with a hostess in her proper place at last, the presence of ladies would grace the feasts.

Gladys got through two big dinners fairly well. Then she was subjected to the severest known test of social qualifications. A great—the very greatest honor fell upon Lord and Lady Brentwood and Andover House, tumbled from a propitious sky long before they could reasonably have anticipated or craved for such unique distinction.

As the hour of dinner approached, policemen wearing plain clothes, as well as policemen wearing helmets, paced beneath the stone walls on either side of the porch and its symbolic, ceremonious, nerve-disturbing red carpet. Above the area-copings, up and down Carolus Street, there showed rows of bodiless heads—servants gaping for the rapid, silent, inexpressibly impressive pageant of the portentous arrival.

State liveries had been brought from tissue paper wrappings; Mr. Marlow in command was calm, stern, terrible as Napoleon on the eve of a battle; Mr. Osborn, the butler, was steady as a rock; the whole staff were firm beneath the shock, and stood their ground bravely; and the hostess got through the ordeal somehow—but, alas, not too well. Hitherto, big social planets had twinkled before her, she had borne the cold glare of the large fixed stars; but now the light-giving orb of all the social system was shining full upon her. Perhaps the over-powering bright rays dazzled her, blinded her, made her trip and blunder. Perhaps no one who is not trained from childhood to support

"'I did all you told me, Seymour. I tried to do all. What was wrong?'"

such glorious radiance can successfully pass so severe a test.

The Light shone in its effulgent splendor from a quarter to nine to eleven o'clock all but three minutes. Then darkness descended, or rather was reinstated, and there was nothing left for the highly honored Lord and Lady Brentwood to do but that which is done by Mr. and Mrs. Jones of Tooting, or Mr. and Mrs. Brown of Balham, directly their guests have driven off—ask each other if their little dinner has gone off well.

"Oh, yes," said Seymour. "Quite right. Yes, everything was all right."

But she knew, by something flat or toneless in his voice, that he was secretly dissatisfied—not with Mr. Marlow, Mr. Osborn, or the others, but with her, his well-meaning but insufficiently trained assistant.

"I did all you told me, Seymour. I tried to do all. What was wrong?"

"Nothing—nothing. It was all right."

But she knew he was discontented; and thus the great unsolicited honor of that night brought her nothing better than a heavy heart, a pillow wet with tears, and a dream of inexplicable, unavoidable pain.

It will be readily understood that this great honor was not a matter to be dealt with in the secretariat. Etiquette forbade that it should be turned to account for the good of the Party. Mr. Roberts sent no word of it to the public press; but it was briefly and more gloriously chronicled by a line in the Court Circular. Only then did Fashionable Intelligence get to know of it.

"Lord Brentwood," said busy paragraphists, "is a *persona grata* at Court, and no one will be surprised to hear that Andover House was honored last night by . . . In accordance with the customary rule, frock dress was worn by all the men present."

Successful, praised, flattered by ever-widening attention, Seymour liked his life in this second year of office. Cabinet rank was hinted at as something perceptibly nearer, something that must come sooner or later to reward hard work, distinguished services, and striking, publicly acknowledged

success. People always like doing that which they do really well, if only they can persuade themselves and continue to believe that the thing is worth doing. And now Seymour had succeeded in this too. Vague doubt and unanalyzed misgivings troubled him less and less frequently. All about him believed that without their single and concentrated effort the world could not run and roll so smoothly. He and they were parts of the social and political machine—small parts or big parts, but all of them essential to the working of the vastly intricate, stupendously powerful machine. This belief sustained him and all of them.

So now, the labor of his days, though very heavy was rarely disagreeable to him. He liked changing his clothes for a nation's welfare. He liked to see his portrait—snap-shot or studio picture—in numberless illustrated journals. He liked the start of recognition made by female strangers as he walked through the streets. He liked the feeling of the solid masonry, the wide halls, and lighted galleries ever at his back. He liked his deputy-lieutenant's cocked hat, his yeomanry huzzar busby, his volunteer helmet, his gold-laced official coat, his despatch box, and his portfolio. He liked entertaining vulgar crowds in badly made evening suits, and he liked entertaining a select and cultivated few in faultless frock dress. He liked—more and more—the quiet reposeful atmosphere of the House of Lords, its brown panels, gilded moldings, stained glass; its faintly colored light and its gray depths of shadow; its loftiness and its narrowness; its high-canopied empty throne, and its conveniently situated, rapidly filled waste paper boxes. Everything that appertained to it satisfied him. He liked to sit in long peaceful silence while Opposition lords urbanely criticised the management of his Department, and then, without heat or flurry, to rise and repel the courteous attack. "The noble marquis who has just sat down asks—and, my lords, no question can be more natural—it is a question for which we are altogether prepared," etc. etc.,

It was routine work, but he did the work admirably well; and he liked it immensely, as long as he could preserve that sustaining belief in its essential importance.

Gladys sympathized with him in his work, but she could not understand it. She could not aid him by an intelligent technically educated sympathy, and yet she would make her ridiculous suggestions. She wished that he would bring in laws—thus she expressed herself.

"Seymour, I wish you'd bring in a law making it illegal to send tradesmen's boys on those dreadful heavy tricycles." He explained that his interference in this matter was impossible. But she never could grasp any explanation of the working of the great political machine; and, whenever she went for a walk or a drive, unmade laws occurred to her. "Can't you bring in a law to ventilate shops—to warm waiting-rooms—to stop horses in cabs and vans by law when they ought to stop, because anybody can see they are tired, or overloaded?" He dreaded her suggestions.

"It seems," she said sadly, "that Government can do so little."

"You don't understand. Government is trying to do so much."

Once, or perhaps twice, he talked political economy to her. She did not understand, and she could not or would not learn. It was difficult not to be irritated by her simplicity. Surely, he thought, she should have been aware of how she failed him. Surely she might have instructed herself by reading the debates, studying books, and talking to well-informed friends. But she never knew anything at all. She leaned on him in small things and in great. If her task was to open a bazaar, she asked him what was the object of the charity, was the hospital an old institution or a new one, was the club intended for men or women, and did members pay a subscription or receive the club benefits for nothing. She would not trouble to find out for herself. He had to set a sharp curb on his tongue, to prevent himself from giving voice to the irritation caused by her guileless stupid questions, and by her languor, lassitude, or laziness when she ought to have been brisk, bright, and active in the performance of important duties.

In fact, though he did not realize it, he was irritated because at these times she upset his sustaining belief, she shook his faith in himself, she brought back his own questioning doubts.

Were such things really important? Was the fabric of his life solid as the stone walls of Andover House, or was it vain, baseless, fantastic as the buildings of a dream? Doubt made him excessively uncomfortable, caused him to change his attitude restlessly, cross and recross his knees, take off his hat, put it on again, tilt it over his eyes and push it back, even when he was sitting on what should have properly been to him firm as the bed-rock—that is to say, the front bench of the Government side of the Lords.

Very uncomfortable—these worrying thoughts, dragged upward to the surface by his foolish Gladys! Were my lords really unimportant, unsubstantial as the play of colored light from the stained glass, the gray shadows thrown by the painted walls? Did it really matter what they said yesterday, to-day? Were all these assembled men—from the Lord Chancellor now readjusting his wig, to the clerk wiping his eye-glasses with a silk handkerchief—infinitely small, infinitely futile, ant-like in their assumption of importance and industry, ant-like in their concentration of their ant-heap and their obliviousness of the measureless universe beyond and all around it?

XX

IN May Gladys became suddenly more cheerful. Her brother Schiller had at last returned. One afternoon a loud-voiced, badly-dressed, lean and gaunt American walked into Mr. Copland's Oxford Street Shop, and told the green-coated commissionaire to "fetch out the old man," if he was on the premises.

"What can I do for you, sir?" said Mr. Copland, bowing very slightly and glancing at the stranger suspiciously.

"Don't you know me, guv'nor? Look again—eh? I guess you and I have met before to-day."

Then Mr. Copland recognized and welcomed his long lost youngest son.

Schiller gave many good reasons for his silence. He had

been far from towns and post offices—roughing it on a cattle ranch, roughing it by the Yukon, travelling round the world with a sick pal.

"I reckoned I'd strike the old country again pretty near as soon as a letter would fetch it."

Gladys at first thought he was sadly altered. It was difficult, if not impossible, to detect in this hard-faced noisy traveller any trace of her nursery companion and childhood's friend. But he said he was fond of her as ever; and gradually, when the strangeness of his manner and the uncouthness of his appearance began to wear off, he became again the old amusing Schiller whom she had loved and pined for.

He called her "Gladdie," "little girl," and "Countess Gladdie," and he spoke of his father as "the old man."

"The old man is doing me proud—he'll fit me out in West End togs, make me sort of boss of his store, and give me a fair screw. But Gladdie, little girl, I doubt if I shall stick it long." He said this on the day after his arrival. "I'm right glad to be home—but I know I shall soon want to get on the roll again. . . . Fancy the old man striking oil after all. And fancy little Gladdie picking up such a son of a gun of a swell. Countess Gladdie! Cinderella and Aladdin aren't in it with you and the old man. You've knocked spots off them."

Mr. Copland sent his errant son to the best tailors, hatters, and shirt-makers; put money in his pockets;—in all respects treated him kindly and generously, magnanimously forgetting his desertion, and inviting him to repose himself on a father's heart. In a few days, then, Mr. Schiller was installed as a managerial assistant at the shop, and, assuming the aspect of a normal well-to-do Londoner, dropped his outlandish tricks of speech and ceased to startle one by his loudness and hardness. When he paid a second visit to his loving sister, she felt that she had really recovered her own dear Schiller. Henceforth he came constantly to Andover House. Confinement in the shop was irksome; with or without a valid excuse, he was prompt to leave it; and at all hours of the day he would rejoice Gladys by coming round, "to yarn over old times," or to take her out "to see the sights."

After his long self-ordained exile, he was insatiable in his greed for the pleasures of the town. Restaurants, theatres, exhibitions were a delightful change from log-huts, the horse-play of a miner's camp, the panorama of wild nature. Everything was a treat for Mr. Schiller—to ride on electric trams, to burrow beneath Oxford Street for a trip in the tube railway, to watch "the nobs" in Hyde Park or "the cads" at the Oval, to hear military bands, gramophones, or barrel organs, to peep at moving pictures in automatic machines. And he took his treats freely and largely. He was resourceful in proposals for new treats—an excursion to the Tower of London, the Chamber of Waxwork Horrors, Kew Gardens or Greenwich by steamer;—and whenever Gladys could escape from her social political engagements, she was most happy to accompany him. She loved to get him all to herself for a long afternoon, to drive him down to Hurlingham or Ranelagh, and to enjoy his enjoyment of the polo, the sweet music, the tea and strawberries, and all the other amenities or charms of these attractive clubs.

She could not see too much of him—and Seymour could not see too little of him.

He bothered and bored this busy nobleman most woefully. In his own house Lord Brentwood fled from him, hid from him. At the sound of his voice, the owner of all these spacious rooms, halls, and lobbies, hurried away to the secret retreat contrived and arranged by the prevoyant Mr. Marlow. Safe in his working cabinet, he abandoned the rest of the house to Mr. Schiller; and, rather than risk meeting his friendly and even affectionate brother-in-law as he went out, he would summon a servant to bring his hat and cane, and slink forth into the side street through his mysterious close-shutting *porte dérobée.*

It was an embarrassment, almost a calamity, that Schiller, oblivious of the fact that he was being dodged and avoided, frankly offered a newly found brother's cordial love. He had taken to Lord Brentwood as a real good sort. He wrung Lord Brentwood's hand, he slapped him on the shoulder, and there were tears in his eyes as he told Lord Brentwood that he was grateful to him for marrying his neglected little sister.

"And more power to you," said Mr. Schiller, with genuine emotion. "You knew a good thing when you saw it—and you took our Gladdie, God bless her. You could make a countess of her. You didn't need to hunt for a countess ready-made. You're a good sort, a real tip-topper—right through,—and I'm grateful to you all the time for what you've done for our little Gladdie."

Even more painfully boring to Lord Brentwood, was Mr. Schiller's praise of another tip-topper—his pal, Harold Ingram. Ingram had been left in Paris, but he would be coming over any day; and Schiller promised that at the earliest possible moment he should be presented at Andover House. Meanwhile, his praises were sung with an untiring voice.

"D'you want a fellow to pick out a horse for you? Just wait for my pal, Ingram. Finest judge of a horse I ever met. But there's nothing Hal Ingram doesn't know, and nothing he can't do. . . . Don't you buy a motor without letting Hal Ingram vet it for you. There never was such a fellow—a natural dab at mechanics—never slaves at things, but seems to take it all in at the pores. But don't you know him? You must have run across Hal Ingram somewhere or other."

Lord Brentwood was sure that he had not the pleasure of Mr. Ingram's acquaintance.

"Well, you won't have to wait much longer. He'll be over any day now."

Schiller, adoring his friend, describing his manifold perfections, quoting his *obiter dicta,* soon made Lord Brentwood hate the name of Ingram, made him fretfully vow that it was a name he had never heard of.

"They are a Warwickshire family," said Schiller ingenuously —"my Ingram's Ingrams. Surely you know the family—swells in their way, you know. What you may call the untitled aristocracy—well-connected and all that—not that Hal ever blows about it. He knows he's all right, and that it's himself that counts."

And then Seymour was begged to tax his memory and revive some faded mental picture of this hero.

"Gladdie only let on yesterday that you had done the Boer War. Now, Hal Ingram did that. He was a soldier to begin with, but he chucked it as too flat in peace—only took it up again when war broke out. Hal was in the thick of everything —surely you must have come upon him somewhere?"

Then Seymour vaguely recalled an Ingram of a Dragoon Guard regiment, known to him years ago in London and met again at Pretoria—a quiet unobtrusive, immaculately correct Ingram, and not conceivably the globe-trotting, Jack-of-all trades, blustering Ingram of Schiller's tales. This Ingram, if he ever claimed acquaintance, would prove to be one of a most objectionable class of disbanded volunteer warriors, from whose friendly attacks he had often suffered.

Dreadful and impossible veterans with flaming cheeks, sausage moustaches, and chess-board trousers, sometimes left their cards at his club, or sent messengers from the brass gates to fetch him out of the House of Lords for an interview in the round lobby. Such pestering intruders announced themselves as comrades in arms. They had been with him in "good old South Africa;" their corps had lain by the side of his corps; they had washed in the same muddy, tainted rivers; and now they felt they must shake him by the hand, give him a buck-up and a cheer-ho for auld lang syne. "I'm at the Grand Hotel till Monday. Come in and have a whisky and soda—and I say, if I'm not there, you'll find me at the Junior Badminton." Schiller's warrior pal would be just such a one as these.

But Lord Brentwood, with nerves shaken by Schiller, and weakly apprehensive of further annoyance, was unduly frightened before he had been hurt. Schiller's Ingram *was* the quiet, well-mannered, and altogether elegant Ingram of a fairly good regiment and a quite irreproachable club. It was astonishing but true, and, under a revulsion of feeling, Lord Brentwood asked him to dinner. There was room for another man at one of the three dining-tables to be set out for the next feast; but there was not room for two more men, so Schiller could not be included amongst the gathering. But Schiller had received a kindness in seeing his introduction so

handsomely honored. He must take the compliment paid to his friend as the most delicate sort of compliment that one could pay to himself.

Mr. Ingram knew one or two of the guests at the dinner-party; and he committed no solecisms which could possibly attract the attention or disturb the composure of the host. He had not forgotten how to use his knife and fork; he was able to modulate his open-air voice to the mumbling pitch of polite indoors society; and when some one spoke to him from another table, he did not bellow as if to savage boatmen in distant canoes. Lord Brentwood had no cause to regret the courtesy extended to this straggler from Mayfair.

Observing him once or twice during the progress of the meal, Seymour noticed that he was getting on very well with his immediate neighbors. He seemed to have plenty to say for himself, and yet to be quite willing to listen. The lady by his side talked to him with great vivacity. He was good-looking—distinguished-looking even—of a sallow darkly sun-burnt complexion, close-cropt, clean-shaven, with good eyes, good nose, and strong mouth and chin,—what affected ladies would probably describe as an interesting creature. Of an interesting age too—say thirty-five. Seymour remembered him now perfectly. The years had changed him very slightly from what he was when Seymour used to meet him. He had been quite a smart man about town in those days. It must have been a strange chance that converted him into the faithful pal of a plebeian Americanized Copland Junior.

After the meal, when guests were dispersing themselves about the noble and traditionally famous saloon, Mr. Ingram talked to his hostess. The host, talking to other people and looking at his wife presently, was surprised by the animation induced from this duologue. Her face was bright and gay; she was smiling, nodding her head, listening contentedly, interrupting to chatter volubly and cheerfully. When Lord Brentwood looked round again, twelve or fifteen minutes had passed and the duologue was still lively and vigorous. The hostess, permitting herself to be engrossed by one guest, was in danger of forgetting her duty to all her other guests. Lord Brent-

wood went across to his wife, joined in, and broke up the interesting conversation.

Mr. Ingram had been and was now talking of Schiller. He had talked of nothing else—but, on this absorbingly interesting subject, he had wonderful and most delightful tales to tell an affectionate and suddenly very proud sister.

If Schiller praised Harold, certainly Harold gave back praise for praise. He was devoted to his queer pal.

"Couldn't he come here to-night? I felt sure I should see him here—or I would have gone round to his rooms."

Gladys did not of course say that her brother could not come because her husband would not ask him.

Then Mr. Ingram told his entrancing story. He and Schiller had first met on the Canadian ranch, and they chummed together, but they could do no good ranching. Soon they chucked it, and went with two more men to the Alaska gold-fields; but they did no good there either. It was a partnership of four; everything went wrong; they suffered extreme hardships; but Schiller was the life and soul of the little band, always plucky, jolly, amusing. Just when things were at the worst, Ingram fell ill, the two other partners turned rogue, cheated, robbed, and deserted, leaving Schiller in the lurch with a sick man on his hands. There was a terrible journey before civilization and comfort could be reached. At one point they had to descend a wide river on a sort of raft, for hundreds of miles. And at about the hundred and twentieth mile, Harold the sick man, lying on the raft helpless as a log, received a jolt, and like a log rolled off the raft, and unlike a log, sank. Then Schiller saved his life—plunged into the roaring flood, fished him up, swam to shore with him, and let the raft go on without them.

"Surely he told you about it?"

"No," cried Gladys. "Not a word—not one word." Her eyes sparkled, her pale cheeks flushed, her lips trembled. "That was splendid of him, wasn't it? Oh, please go on."

Mr. Ingram, continuing his delightful tale related how Schiller guarded him and nursed him on the barren shore, until another descending raft picked them up and took them

on. Still nursing his pal, Schiller stuck to his pal for weeks at Vancouver; and afterwards consented to nurse his pal halfway round the globe to home and safety.

"I should have died a dozen times, but for your brother. It wasn't a matter of saving my life once. He had to keep on doing it. . . . And he never said a word about it?"

Then Lord Brentwood came over to break up the conversation. He found his wife radiant, transfigured by joy and pride, with shaky lips babbling confusedly of her heroic brother.

"Seymour, he saved his life—Schiller—and never said a word—more than once—several times. Oh, please tell my husband what my brother did."

The adventure—thought Lord Brentwood—and the natural gratitude of any invalid fished out of deep water explained, and fully accounted for, the palship between two such incongruous people as Mr. Ingram and Mr. Copland Junior. If he himself owed his life to Schiller, he would have asked him to dinner to-night. This was a passing and purposely cynical reflection.

In truth, Mr. Ingram's tale, very briefly repeated for his instruction, made him think much more highly of his brother-in-law than hitherto. Certainly that reticence—silence as to one's grand deeds—was a laudable trait. He submitted to boredom with a better grace, shrunk less churlishly from unsought friendliness, and supported Schiller's frequent presence at Andover House almost contentedly.

Schiller—often accompanied by Ingram—might take Gladys for his little treats, whenever she was not necessary to her husband's comforts or the welfare of the Party. Schiller unquestionably had done her good.

XXI

OLD Mr. Andrew Killick, whose firm had been charged with the magnificent task of running Lord Brentwood financially, was most careful not to trouble the august client

without need. He quite understood that the essence of the commission with which he had been honored lay in saving my lord from all claims on his heavily mortgaged time. Nevertheless, some little trouble every agent must give his principal. Stock-transfers must now and then be signed, and leases, conveyances, etc. require execution. Mr. Killick, as in the old days, often paid morning calls at Andover House with parchment in his black bag and papers bulging from his coat pocket.

He would tell Mr. Osborn, the butler, not to announce him, find his way unescorted to the secretariat, and deposit his documents on the secretary's table.

"Now, Mr. Roberts, can you get these through for me by to-morrow night? Do you think you'll have any chance of putting them before his lordship? I shall be much obliged if you can manage it for me."

Sometimes Mr. Killick would tentatively add: "Do you think his lordship could possibly give me a few minutes this morning?"

At one of these hurried morning interviews during the month of June, Mr. Killick for the first time lapsed from good behavior, and was distinctly troublesome, by talking of the affairs he was paid to manage.

"I rather wonder," said Mr. Killick, "that you took shares in that Hotel company—what do they call it?—Seaside Hotels."

"Why not? Isn't it all right?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. I know nothing about it. I could find out, of course. But I never heard of it till the Bank wrote to us—to provide for your draft."

Lord Brentwood explained to his man of business that he had bought a few shares in Seaside Hotels, Ltd. with very little thought. A certain Sir Gregory Stuart was chairman of the company, and he had offered Lord Brentwood a block of shares at a very low quotation—or, as Sir Gregory himself expressed it, had invited Lord Brentwood to come in on the ground floor. Sir Gregory—as Mr. Killick might not know—was Liberal candidate for the South-east Sussex division, and was favorably viewed by the Party; he had been received at

Andover House; and, on the whole, it seemed unlikely that he would try to lure a member of the Government into an unsound investment.

"But find out about it for me. If it isn't all right, I'll tell Sir Gregory that I cannot be connected with it—and we'll sell the things for what they'll fetch."

Mr. Killick said he would, as instructed, inquire into the status of Seaside Hotels.

"Why I mentioned it," he went on, "was really for this reason. At the moment, we had some difficulty in providing the money."

"Only twenty thousand, wasn't it?"

Then followed a troublesome business talk. Was his lordship aware that his expenses had reached to an astounding height, that in the last two years money had been pouring out like water—like pent-up water bursting its reservoir dams, and cascading away in a wide flood.

His lordship was not aware. He had kept no private accounts. He knew that he was not personally extravagant. Indeed, he was too busy a man to have time for spending money on himself. But, naturally, the calls upon one in his position were heavy. Collingbourne Court, though scarcely ever used, had to be kept going. Charities, too, must be supported. He liked to see his name at the top of donation lists, and had given £500 at a time to deserving hospitals and institutions. How many checks for five hundred? He did not know or care. He had lent money to old friends, and to strangers. Half the letters brought to him in Mr. Roberts's trays demanded checks as the only satisfactory answers. Of course the entertainments at Andover House cost something. A guinea a head is a modest catering charge: nevertheless, when you have welcomed a thousand guests, you have spent a thousand pounds. How many thousands of guests had been fed with quails and strawberries for the good of the Party?

"But what do you mean?" asked Lord Brentwood sternly. "You are not trying to tell me that I am hard up—as my poor father used to complain?"

Oh, no. Heaven forbid that Mr. Killick, as head bailiff,

should come to his chief with any such ridiculous story. All he meant was this:— We were temporarily hard pressed; we were passing through a perfectly natural period of financial tightness; but money would be again superabundant next year, or the year after. Much of Lord Brentwood's expenditure had been of the character of capital outlay. But now he was established, and for the future his revenues would doubtless maintain him. Lord Brentwood must not forget the crippling effect of the capitalization of his princely gift to Lady Collingbourne, and the satisfaction of the colossal claims of the State.

"Yes, but let me understand how I stand. We paid duty on two millions, didn't we?"

"Yes—just over."

"And you said we got off cheap."

"Yes, cheaper than I dared hope."

"Well, then, that ought to mean—even at three per cent—an annual income of sixty thousand. I suppose I can safely say that?"

"Oh, good gracious, no. *Sixty* thousand!" Mr. Killick laughed good-humoredly, shook his head, and lifted his hands. "No, no. Something like forty thousand is all we must count on in the very fattest years."

This troublesome business talk made Seymour Brentwood very uncomfortable. He did not know the amount of his own income; he knew nothing; and the sudden sense of ignorance and helplessness brought with it shame. Once more he felt, as in old days, like a child thought for, controlled, guided by grown-up people. In Mr. Killick's face he thought he could see the look that two years ago had irritated him. This old man spoke to him as to one avowedly incompetent—a child still in leading strings. Pomp and power had been given to him; and he had taken the pomp to himself, and delegated all the power to others. If only fate had allowed him a little leisure—a breathing space before starting on his political career, —he would of course have obtained mastery over his own private affairs. Then, like Frederick the Great, he would have been ready to turn this agent inside out, and show him that the minutest details were not too small for the examination of

the ruler's eye. Sitting now thoughtfully regarding Mr. Killick, he once more reconfirmed his resolution. The day that the Conservatives returned to office, he would be free of national business, and would throw himself with energy into his own concerns.

Meanwhile—at this moment—he felt shaken, insecure, and fretful,—far too much at the mercy of Mr. Killick. One day Mr. Killick had told him he was enormously rich; to-day Mr. Killick said he was temporarily poor; to-morrow Mr. Killick might say that all the money was gone. Suppose that Mr. Killick, who talked so glibly of dishonest agents, was himself a cheat of cheats, arch-traitor, prince of impostors. Very unsatisfactory—this blind belief in and total delegation of power to anyone, however old and gray and professionally eminent he might be.

With childish insistence Lord Brentwood stuck to his point about capital value and income—as if half expecting to bowl out Mr. Killick here and now.

"Then what did the two millions mean exactly—selling value?"

"Yes, just that—what one might reasonably expect to realize in the open market if we sold everything you possessed."

"And do you guarantee that as much as that would be realized? Suppose I gave you an order to-morrow to sell me up do you guarantee that you could bring me the two millions?"

Mr. Killick smiled amiably, and answered all questions as if humoring the whim of a child.

"Well, perhaps not to-morrow—but within a reasonable time. Large estates, grand houses, vast interests, cannot be disposed of to advantage in a hurry. One must wait for one's market.—Sales of such a character would take a considerable time, unless we were prepared to sacrifice our property."

"But given the time—Are you sure you could get the two millions?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Killick firmly, as if anxious to drive all foolish terrors from the mind of his fanciful child. "Quite certain to get more than the two millions. Not the least doubt of that."

Then Lord Brentwood addressed himself to the question of income. How was it possible that two millions brought one only forty thousand a year?

Mr. Killick reminded Lord Brentwood of what he had said two years ago. All this wealth was splendidly solid, immovable: not like the liquid gold of a vulgar millionaire. Lord Brentwood's estates and possessions were a little realm or kingdom, from which the revenue must be relatively small when compared with capital value. You had large values represented by wooded hills, wide moors, vales and streams, that gave you nothing at all beyond a pleasant view. You had large values represented by palaces, like Andover House and Collingbourne Court, which, far from bringing in money, steadily drew money out. For instance, take the contents of the picture gallery at Collingbourne Court. Those beautiful old masters —let off very cheap by state inquisitors—formed a large value themselves, but they yielded not an annual penny. They caused money to be spent every day—onerous insurance, watchmen to guard them, servants trained to work as amateur firemen, frame-makers and glaziers to tinker and repair, experts to come and report on their condition, luncheons and teas to be supplied for distinguished visitors who came to admire them. This was a good instance of indisputable value producing unavoidable expenditures.

Mr. Killick, by good-humored explication, made his client feel more comfortable. The sense of discomfort and shakiness passed away. Mr. Killick was all right—he would never play one false. But Lord Brentwood derived from this particular talk an entirely new estimation of his circumstances. He did not possess inexhaustible resources, and he *did* possess the capacity to use them to their extreme limits. It would be wise therefore, should chances occur, to increase income by release of locked up values,, and by investment in revenue-yielding securities.

"Don't forget," he said, as he bade good-morning to Mr. Killick, "about the hotel company."

When next Mr. Killick was privileged by seeing his client, he reported favorably on Seaside Hotels Ltd. His city friends

thought it was a good thing, and not a bad thing. The shares were at a considerable premium, and likely to go higher.

"Yes," said Mr. Killick, "so far as one can judge, good really—but of course purely speculative. Not shares to hold for ever, but to sell at the best time and take one's profit."

Evidently it would appear that Sir Gregory and his fellow promoters, his friends, his furniture man, and his faithful humble adherents, had fallen into a surprisingly good thing. Dividends of thirty and thirty-five per cent declared on Beach-End Ordinary for the last two years, and already the successful parent company had given birth to three other companies—who could ask for more? All that Sir Gregory touched seemed to turn to gold. Rich before, he now had, one might suppose, more money than he knew what to do with—even when loyally aided in its dispersal by Miss Edie Danvers of post-card fame.

Miss Danvers had a bijou residence in Belgravia, an ornate cottage on the Upper Thames, and a motor-car to carry her to and fro. Recent post-cards had shown Miss Danvers making up with precious gems for scantiness of bodice—displaying her natural charms through a lattice-work of diamonds. But perhaps the jewels were false, or perhaps Edie was unappeasably avaricious, or perhaps Sir Gregory was fickle—pasha-like, wearying of his sultana. Anyhow, there were furious quarrels between Edie and her kind friend.

Mr. Waller, secretary of hotel companies, ancient henchman and confidant, once spoke to Sir Gregory of the friendship with Miss Danvers as an unlucky entanglement. The fame of Miss Edie might spread with damaging effect through the Sussex constituency. An unscrupulous Opposition will snatch up any weapon and use it wickedly. Her post-card pictures might frighten prospective shareholders. A candidate for Parliament and chairman of flourishing but tender young companies cannot be too careful.

With faithful well-tried Waller, Sir Gregory had no secrets; and he said now, bluntly and baldly, that he would ask the

charming and talented lady to go to the devil. He spoke of her and of her sex grossly and almost violently. Indeed, it was characteristic of Sir Gregory that he could not talk of women—whether confidentially to a toady, or in general terms among strangers—without betraying his intrinsic coarseness and brutality.

"What do women want, I should like to know. They're all the same. They'll chuck you—no matter what you've done for them—and throw themselves at the head of the first fancy man that comes their way. Look at that fellow Brentwood—That's the type to get everything for nothing. They go mad about him—and fellows of that sort."

"But Lord Brentwood has not interfered with——"

"Oh, no. He came into my mind because all the women are in love with him. Edie bought his photograph, and made me buy the frame. . . . If you're kind to them, they always round on you. And when a woman begins to play the fool—I don't care who she is—you may take it from me, Waller, there's only one thing to do with her."

"And what may that be?"

"Give her a damned good thrashing," said red-faced Sir Gregory, brutally, decisively, and by no means as if he meant this for a coarse joke.

Then, without any transitional pause, he spoke most affectionately of his wife.

"I hope my dear Leonora hasn't got wind of Edie, or been worried by tale-bearers. Poor soul! It would be very cruel if my enemies—and I know I've plenty of 'em—made her suffer because they hadn't the pluck to strike at me."

Mr. Waller was able to assure his patron that Lady Stuart had never been disturbed by rumors of diamond lattice-work, Thames villa, or 70 h.p. motor.

Curiously enough, in spite of all Edies—a series of infidelities co-extensive with his married life,—Sir Gregory was truly a devoted husband and father. There was no trickery or deception in the pretty home pictures that he offered to charm or soften sentimental visitors at Knightsbridge.

He went now to his wife's darkened room, sat with the

cherished, if deceived invalid for more than an hour—only left her side when the gong sounded for the children's early dinner. Then he went down to preside at the innocent meal, to carve the roast mutton or chicken for the happy noisy diners, to chop up her meat for the little golden-haired girl whose place at table was always next to Dad, and to plead with her governess that she might have another helping of gooseberry pie and custard pudding. He was not acting, posing as a kind Dad, in order to make this picture of pure home joy. He was really happy in the society of his children.

He loved to take them to the Zoo on Sundays, to the pantomime at Christmas, to the Crystal Palace on warm summer evenings for the fireworks. He gave them the most expensive and proficient governesses, tutors, music masters, and took the liveliest interest in their mental and bodily education. He bought his fine house chiefly for their pleasure. They had a carriage reserved solely for the use of the nursery. They had ponies to ride, a groom to go on horseback, and a groom to go on foot. He loved to make an appointment with his little girl, and meet her in Hyde Park when she was riding her long-tailed Shelty.

"You look out for Daddy to-morrow morning at a quarter-past twelve, at the top of Rotten Row; and if Daddy can be there, he will be there."

"I shall wait for you, Daddy, so don't disappoint."

To keep such an engagement, he would rush through business interviews in the City, bustle and hurry directors at board meetings, flout and scout people who tried to stop him in the street, make himself hot and frantic, as he came tearing westward, if a block of traffic threatened his Lorna with a disappointment.

Coming thus to Hyde Park corner on a bright June day, he found the family cavalcade at the appointed hour and spot, and stood mopping his brow while the children chattered to him.

"There, see how warm Dad is. You don't know what a race I've had, Lorna. And I am a naughty Dad to come to-day. A big angry gentleman is expecting me in Lombard Street—and that's where I ought to be now."

"No, no, Dad."

Then Sir Gregory took the leading rein from the groom's hand, and led his little girl's diminutive pony down the Row.

"You go ahead," he said to the other children. "You can go faster than we can."

It made another pretty family picture; and many riders, glancing at the group, noticed it—the fair-haired child, the brave little pony resolutely plodding over the tan, and red-faced Sir Gregory, stout, square, robust, with his hat on the back of his head, resolutely plodding over the tan beside the pony.

"What's the matter, Dad? Why have you stopped?"

The small Shelty was untired, but the tan was too much for big Sir Gregory. He had stopped short, seized with a queer fatigue, his feet aching and seeming as heavy as lead, after he had gone about a hundred yards.

He beckoned the groom, gave him the rein again, and sat down to rest. It was the tan that had pumped him so suddenly and so queerly. Confounded stuff—only *called* tan—not tan really: beastly loose earth and muck, as sticky and holding as a ploughed field after rain! His feet were all right again directly he reached the gravel path. Sitting on a chair in the shade beneath a tree, he felt refreshed immediately; and when the children returned in two or three minutes, he was able to walk with them comfortably. But he kept on the gravel, inside the rails, and let the groom lead the pony. Once or twice he looked down at the rough loose tan, with a rather curious expression on his red face: as if the tan had made him angry, and at the same time frightened him.

He could not go home with the children and carve their chicken for them to-day. Dad, he said, must hurry back to the city and earn some more money for them. He must fly as fast as he could, or angry scowling Mr. Malcomson of Lombard Street would eat him up in anger.

Mr. Malcomson certainly was in no pleasant humor when Sir Gregory arrived, an hour and twenty minutes after he had been expected.

"Let's have some lunch," he said brusquely. "When we've done, I'll hear what you've got to tell me about this new business."

The new business, expounded presently by Sir Gregory, was still another company—another bouncing child of the parent company. This child would be a real whopper—a giant offspring of a prolific little parent. Sir Gregory proposed, and firmly intended, to take over the Darmstadt Hotel Brook Street, W., nearly to knock it down, build it up again thrice as high, and run it as the most extravagantly luxurious hotel in all London. He meant to do it; he would do it. All that he touched turned to gold. In this ostentatious, gluttonous, pleasure-seeking age, you could not overdo the hotel business. The new Darmstadt, if properly worked, would scoop the pool, catch salmon with sprats, change pence into pounds.

Mr. Malcomson listened to the now-well-known eloquence without agreeing, without denying.

"But we want a chairman," said Sir Gregory enthusiastically; "we can't work this by ourselves. I want a figure-head—I want an ornamental chairman. And I'll tell you the man I have in my eye—Lord Brentwood!"

Moodily and gloomily Malcomson listened, while Sir Gregory described the peculiar virtues of this nobleman as a figure-head.

"He is a big pot politically, and he is a big pot in society. He'll draw all the fashionable people after him, and the really big people too, and then the crowd will follow. He is a favorite with our side and the other side; and I am hanged if I know why—but he is a favorite with the public. Last week I was at the Mansion House—to meet those Frenchmen—Lord Brentwood had the best reception of anybody there—and *everybody* was there. Another thing—the women are all mad about him,—buy his photographs, run along the pavement to look at him. He'll draw all the women after him. Another thing—he used to live at the Darmstadt, and people know that,—so he is identified with it already. Given him for chairman, the place will be known as Lord Brentwood's Hotel. It will go off with a bang, make its hit right away—

. . . You may take it from me, Malcomson, he is our man. No one would be so good—and I mean to get him."

And then Sir Gregory asked for Malcomson's assistance in this far from easy enterprise.

"Of course," he said, " Copland ought to manage it for us. But Copland has frittered away any influence he might have had. And he's *afraid* of his son-in-law—can only brag about him behind his back. It was *I,* and not Copland, that persuaded him to take up those Seasides."

"What about the daughter—Lady Brentwood?"

"No use. She's just a nonentity—amiable idiot,—and *she's* afraid of him, too. No, you must back me up. You and I must do it between us."

"I do not know Lord Brentwood," said Malcomson gloomily; "and I do not go into society, so I am unlikely to meet him. My son knew him—but never intimately."

"We must get you to Andover House, somehow," said Sir Gregory, with a suddenly patronizing tone. "I go there. I know him well—though it's difficult to come to close grips with him. But, somehow or other, I must get him to ask you to dinner."

"No, thank you," said Mr Malcomson. "I do not care for dining out with people who——"

"Don't you?" interrupted Sir Gregory, and he laughed. "Oh, I thought you liked dining out, but didn't like inviting people to dine with you."

Notwithstanding their close alliance, Mr. Malcomson had never yet invited Sir Gregory to cross the threshold of the Bayswater mansion. He had dined five or six times in Knightsbridge, and some return of hospitality was therefore long overdue. Sir Gregory, noticing this strange lack of proper attention, resented it; and was glad of an opportunity to show his associate that he considered himself neglected, if not affronted.

"I see your point," he continued, smiling grimly. "You don't wish to go where you feel you're not really welcome. *I* feel just like that."

Tackled in so firm a manner, Mr. Malcomson was con-

strained to offer some sort of apology, or at least an explanation of his remissness.

"*You,*" he said very gloomily, "would be welcome as a guest at any time—and I hope you *will* dine with us some day soon. But my wife and I have been asking no one lately. We have had anxieties—and ill health in our family."

Mr. Malcomson, rich before, and now growing richer, was certainly also growing gloomier. The Lombard Street clerks could have told Sir Gregory that every day he was more morose, more overbearing, and generally a greater terror to all in his employ. The clerks and managers of the banking establishment all believed that there must be some secret trouble at home, to account for the sullen rage and explosive captiousness that Mr. Malcomson brought with him to his office morning after morning.

Coarsely bluff and genial Sir Gregory was contented by his friend's implied apology. If no offence had been meant, no offence was taken. Sir Gregory thought he knew the cause of Bayswater private anxiety. Malcomson had a marriageable but unmarried daughter, concerning whom some extremely scandalous stories had reached Sir Gregory. They were true, then? This was why old Malcomson and his fat wife had ceased to give dinner-parties, had closed their doors, and concealed their domestic circle from an inquisitive world. Sir Gregory was sorry for the glum old patriarch, plagued by a scandal-producing daughter; and, forgetting his own fatherly tendernesses, he thought to himself: "If I was in his place, I'd give her a dashed good hiding—or break her neck—before I'd let her upset me like that."

XXII

THE trouble at the house in the Bayswater Road was Irene.

She upset everybody—father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends, servants,—all who came within the hysterical-storm

area of which she was the unstable center or moving vortex. For the last two years she had been as completely out of hand as some natural and yet catastrophic phenomenon—a tidal wave, a trembling of the ground, an eruption of lava dust. One could only watch the phenomenon, clasp one's hands, and pray that the manifestation of uncontrollable energy would soon cease. Mr. Malcomson prayed and swore, but could not sleep at night. Irene, by her pranks and vagaries, had impaired his digestion and rendered him so biliously angry that even money-making could now bring him no pleasure. His own lucrative business and what he called his "hobby" —the hotel companies—might make him the richest patriarch in Bayswater, and he would still feel himself a disappointed man. As to portly Mrs. Malcomson: perpetual fear of what Irene was now doing, or would do next, had weakened the action of her fat-enveloped heart. She panted breathlessly every time her husband swore; and doctors told her that there was peril for her climbing stairs, getting in and out of carriages, and kneeling at divine service. The poor, fat, over-burdened creature fainted when her son Tom came and excitedly clamored for her help, to break off the friendship between Irene and his young wife.

Honest Tom Malcomson, growing weary of bachelor amusements after office hours; had appropriately chosen and wedded a nice little wife. Miss Dulake was a cousin of the banking business; she was pretty and amiable, if feather-headed; in all respects a promising life-partner for Tom—until Irene made an intimate chum of her, debauched her by baleful advice, filled her empty head full of morbid fantastic notions, and thus played the devil with Tom's hope of well-earned peace and well-deserved happiness. It was as if Irene had given her a fever kiss, and set her blood on fire—or had given her a dreadful mysterious tarantula bite. Stung into unbearable nerve-restlessness, she rushed hither and thither, was never quiet herself, and would not suffer quiet in others. She mocked Tom's stupid middle-class Bayswaterish desires for cradle, perambulator, and that sort of domestic luggage. If perpetual motion wards off motherhood, so much the better.

Perhaps Irene had told her to keep moving as the best way of thwarting Tom and preserving one's elegant figure.

The Irene virus, poisoning their lives, induced a horrid ambition to be fashionable and hang the expense. The comfortable modest house in Sussex Square—wedding gift of old Malcomson—was abandoned after three months' occupation. Mr. Malcomsom senior said the house was good enough for a lord; and young Mrs. Tom said, if you are a lord, any locality is good enough, but if your name is Malcomson, you must be mad to live in Bayswater—you give yourself away too utterly. She moved her reluctant untitled husband to Pont Street, and—hanging the expense—set him up in a profusely fashionable style; and then, within two months, talked boldly of moving him to Berkeley Square. When Mr. Malcomson called at No. 307 Pont Street—saw but the outside of it: the paint and glitter of it, the blue china and flowers in the balcony, the puffed blinds, the yellow victoria and matched bays, the coachman on the box, the footman on the pavement, and the footman peeping at him through a little window by the hall door,—when, with stifling apoplectic sensations, he saw all these signs of wanton extravagance, he was angry, but surely not unreasonably angry. He took his son into a sumptuously furnished apartment behind the hall, and, within earshot of the footmen, began to roar and rave. He bullied his son and bellowed at him. Where did Tom expect to get the money? Not from *him*. No, by God. Did Tom pretend for a moment that, as the most junior partner of Dulake, Malcomson and Co., he could afford this or anything like it?

But worse than the thought of money was the dread of dishonor. While poor Tom sat tied to his office desk, a frivolous foolish wife rushed hither and thither wtih her newly acquired men-friends—to race meetings, Henley Regattas, Fleet and Army Reviews. She had many friends to whom he was a stranger. She went to dinner-parties without him, came home late and said she had been taken on to evening-parties. She stayed in country houses without him—in one country house that he had long since protested against: the house of Irene's

dressmaker. Did she mean to ruin him first, and then offer him escape through the doors of the Divorce Court?

Rightly or wrongly, he blamed Irene for all his miseries and disasters. Decree nisi, or at least judicial separation, was coming nearer and nearer when Father-in-law Dulake interposed. There were noisy distressing scenes—bellowings of Malcomson senior—faintings, gaspings, heart-flutterings of Mamma,—and then patched-up reconciliation for Mr. and Mrs. Tom. Dulake and Tom, standing shoulder to shoulder, enforced a humiliating condition to the secret family treaty.

Freedom from Irene—Miss Malcomson for the future debarred by treaty from oral or written communication with her sister-in-law and chum!

But, with this friendship broken by treaty, the trouble deepened in the Bayswater Road. Malcomson had bullied Tom for not checking the extravagance of his wife; but, when he tried to keep his daughter within bounds, he himself failed. Irene did not ask for money: she plunged into debt. "You needn't made a fuss," she said scornfully. "If you don't want to pay, let me go bankrupt."

Soon lonely chumless Irene took up motoring, travelled at prohibited rates of speed, went to Exeter and back between breakfast and bed time, ran over dogs and poultry, nearly killed a child in the Bath Road. She said the high speed was good for her nerves, soothed her, drove away insomnia. She had her own motor-car—and her own chauffeur. Handsome car—neighbors said,—and handsome man. The stationary motor, throbbing and rattling in the Bayswater Road, made Malcomson's seventeen-hand barouche horses snort and shy, made the policeman on his beat look suspiciously at its number, made the neighbors wink and smile and talk. See that Malcomson girl—just started, sitting in the front part by the side of her motor man—going the pace with a vengeance. Smugly respectable, malicious-tongued Bayswater expected explosion louder than any back-firing, smelt mischief more unpleasant than any naphtha fumes.

Then, while neighbors watched and chattered, there came sudden eclipse of Irene. Absence of Irene occasioning more

scandal than Irene's presence—Irene is in Switzerland, under chaperonage of her old governess; Irene has gone to Dresden for the study of music; Irene is doing a rest cure. Anyhow, Irene is not on view. Friends and neighbors may draw what conclusions they please.

Bayswater gossips, making much out of little, talked loudly of "the assault case." The chauffeur had summoned old Malcomson for assaulting him on the steps of No. 900; but the complainant never appeared before the magistrate, and the charge fell to the ground. What of it? Malcomson, in anger, did strike or push the man—for wilfully frightening the barouche horses.

Eclipse of Irene lasted a long time. Month after month, no Irene—friends counted the months with malicious care. And then Irene showed her face again, pale, changed, with eyelids that drooped quickly when you looked at her. Irene's spirit seemed gone. It would come back again; but temporarily she bade no one defiance, could not show fight if Papa bullied her. She was subdued, altered, but strangely more handsome than of old; and she crept about the house, frowned on by Papa. Irene was visible, but under a frowning cloud —and again friends might draw what conclusions they pleased.

Scandalous tales about Malcomson's daughter spread far and wide in Bayswater, then farther and wider outside it. There was nothing to stop them reaching Knightbridge and Sir Gregory Stuart. But there were social barriers, many non-conducting circles of rank and fashion, to be passed before they could reach the middle of Mayfair. Yet they got there at last—to the remote, well-guarded ears of so great a personage as Seymour Charlton, 6th Earl of Brentwood.

The cheerfulness of Gladys had not been enduring. The brave Schiller who enlivened her soon began to sadden her. At first she could rely on him to fill all blank hours and banish dull thoughts, but now her brave and volatile brother often preferred to amuse himself by himself. It had been a delight to supply him with pocket-money. She pressed her gifts upon

him, overcame his reluctance, and by affectionate solicitation forced him to accept them. With salary from Papa and presents from her, Mr. Schiller had, in his own phrase, been made flush. He was progressing from such innocent amusement as peep-shows and tram-rides to pleasures of the town in which a sister could take no share. Once, when she spoke of him anxiously to his pal, Mr. Ingram hinted at the danger of making Schiller too flush. A high-spirited wanderer from the wilds may be safer in London with empty pockets than with uncounted gold to jingle and throw about him. Harold Ingram, who knew her Schiller better than she did and loved him almost as much, plainly hinted that her gifts had been imprudent. She was saddened by the thought that her money was worse than useless, that with it she could not help Schiller, that perhaps she could not in any way help him: that, truly, he did not want her.

There was returning sadness for her in all that he said of her father, and in all that Mr. Copland said of him. Schiller complained of the old man's swagger, his ridiculous ruses and inventions, his vainglorious boastings, and his frequent stinginess. Mr. Copland complained of Schiller's idleness, carelessness, and ingratitude.

"I wish him to take part in my prosperity," said Copland; "but you can see for yourself, Gladys, he owes me respect and obedience—at any rate, before my staff. I cannot let him turn my very large establishment upside down, and unsettle and put out my most trusted assistants."

"The old man," said Schiller disrespectfully, "is making a queen of Miss Vincent—and there's no chance of pleasing him unless you please her. And of course," added Schiller, with a smile of ugly meaning, "if one really *did* please her, all the fat would be in the fire."

Schiller's description of Papa's thraldom to his russet-haired, slim-waisted secretary was painfully distressing.

"At his age, the old man ought to know better, Gladdie. When you rag me for undutifulness, don't forget that he isn't an angel of virtue. It sickens me to watch him. He brings a bunch of flowers every morning and puts it in the vase over

her desk. I tell you fairly, I shan't stick it long. He and I could never get on together. He's just the same impenitent, gassing, tricky old man that he was seven years ago when I lit out from the King's Road."

These charges and countercharges lowered the spirits of an affectionate sister and daughter. Must one blush for kind Papa, and, while blushing, confess that his heroic son showed little gratitude or right feeling? Must one understand that each would go his own way, that neither really required one's loving company?

Perhaps depressed by these and other cares, she looked sad and languid as ever when she approached her husband with a petition that she might be allowed to give help where help was needed, and had been piteously prayed for.

Almost at the first words of the petition, Lord Brentwood became stern and grave; without hearing the end of it, he shook his head negatively.

"My dear Gladys, I told you long ago that she was not a proper friend for you—but you would not believe me. Since then she has proved how right I was. She is now an impossible friend."

Gladys pleaded humbly and sweetly on behalf of her friend.

Miss Malcomson, with the most moving terms, had appealed for aid; it was in the power of Gladys, or rather of her husband, to do a great kindness; surely it would be wrong to refuse. Surely, when one was strong, one should not be harsh to the weak.

"Seymour, I wouldn't ask you, if I did not feel that we ought to do it."

"Have you any idea what people are saying of her?"

"Yes—she told me herself that they are saying horrible things."

"How do we know they are not true?" and Seymour delicately, and yet clearly, gave outlines of the story that had reached him from distant Bayswater. "No doubt she told you the scandal had no foundation in fact. But do you, yourself, know anything definite?"

"I haven't tried to know," said Gladys, still pleading the cause of her ancient friend. "I only know that she is in dis-

grace with her parents—with her father especially—and that she is very unhappy. She says if *we* countenance her, people will stop talking. And if we invite her parents too, her father will forgive her."

"Why should he do that?"

"They want to come here—to be seen here."

"Oh, they can't be so foolish as——"

"Irene says they are."

Lord Brentwood was flattered by the thought that Andover House and its evening parties loomed so large in the mind of a hard-headed man of business like old Malcomson. This was pleasantly conclusive evidence of his success. Andover House under the new regime had done more than uphold the old traditions: it had obtained for itself a cachet as of a princely court. The honor of *entrée* reinstated lost reputations. To be received there was the final ambition of city magnates after praiseworthy and prosperous lives of labor. The thought softened him, touched him with pity for maligned Irene and her honest parents.

It was to the credit of Miss Malcomson that she went the right way to work in begging for so great a favor. She did not belittle the extent of the boon. She was aware that everybody wanted to go to these grand evening-parties. So many people had bothered Lord Brentwood with similar requests, that he dreaded the sharp twist of conversation which led to open or hinted demands for an invitation. But applicants—with or without well-founded claims—nearly always adopted a wrong tone. Often they seemed to say in effect: For myself I do not care a hang for your evening-party, and possibly shall be bored by it. I ask only to give pleasure to another—my wife, daughter, or ward. Thus, old Mr. Killick had asked for his grand-daughter—just out. But that meant having Mr. and Mrs. George Killick also. The old gentleman brought them in his landau, *four* of them.—All very well; but an indiscretion, deficiency of social tact on the part of Mr. Killick, not to tell the truth and say he and his son and son's wife were pining to see Andover House *en fete* and their names in the *Morning Post* next morning. Miss Irene did not blunder

after this manner. She said: "It is a great thing that I ask. Have mercy on me, and grant my prayer."

The prayer was granted. To do a kind thing, to please an eloquently pleading sad-eyed wife, Seymour at last shook his head affirmatively. Mr. Roberts had instructions to increase the immense list of guests for the next evening-party by one more entry—Mr. and Mrs. Malcomson; Miss Malcomson.

Irene at once made her appearance at Andover House. Before the cards were sent out for the evening reception, she had been admitted two or three times to luncheon. Bayswater might know that, if it fought shy of her, Mayfair welcomed her. Bayswater could see her driving through the Park at the fashionable hour with her friend Lady Brentwood. The dark cloud was lifting for Irene: slowly she raised her bronze head, and with her violet eyes looked the world in the face.

Seymour Brentwood, finding her seated at the luncheon table, observed that she was altered and that the alteration was a great improvement. He remembered an over-dressed theatrical young lady, who, after the wedding breakfast, had squeezed his hand and gushed at him. She had left with him an unpleasant memory; but now he wondered if he had judged her too hardly. The theatrical gestures had gone; he could detect no pretensions or affectations; she was subdued but self-possessed; her voice even sounded differently. When he made her talk, she spoke in low modulated tones—and very intelligently.

A clever girl undoubtedly.—She took interest in the politics of the day; and she was apparently well-versed in the politics of other days, and countries other than England. She possessed, it seemed, a taste for sociology; had read the best known text-books, and got something definite out of them as first principles, although she modestly declared that she did not attempt thoroughly to understand them. But she appeared to understand quite clearly the aim and scope of the programme of the existing Government, and the immense difficulties that confronted the Government in their endeavor to realize the smallest part of their scheme.

"But you'll go on trying," said Irene; and there came from her violet eyes the first subdued flash—as of nascent confidence or momentary enthusiasm. "You'll go on fighting. If you fail to-day, you are winning the battle for the men who will fight to-morrow."

Seymour glanced at her doubtfully and critically. A theatrical touch—enthusiasm overdone, and not appropriate? But the flash had faded: Irene had turned to his wife, was talking of the weather. It had been quite genuine then—the warmer tone, the intense expression, aroused by interest, not assumed artificially.

Gladys, too, observed and greatly wondered. For her the altered manner was strikingly noticeable. Listening, she remembered Irene's philosophic outbreaks and windy extemporized nonsense. On all subjects she used to be didactic, violent, and anxious to shock one. Now, she was modest, hesitating; not wishing to teach, asking to be instructed. She never shocked one now: in private talk, as in general conversation, she was strangely circumspect.

Outwardly, the alteration was as remarkable. Dignity of aspect, as well as an extraordinary increase of beauty, had come to slandered Irene. She moved more slowly, carried herself better, and could stand still. Her white skin was smoother, softer, her red lips seemed more perfectly molded. Perhaps they had lost the old petulance, and gained beauty from repose. Her hair was magnificent: stronger, and yet softer and more lustrous. Gladys, who had never admired her before, thought her surprisingly handsome. What had happened to Irene thus to change her?

It was very, very curious—another complete alteration of something one thought one knew; to be pondered over and traced to its source, if one dared. It was as if Irene in a moment had secretly and mysteriously achieved all her fantastic desires, and henceforth could be at peace. In the puzzle she presented for unravelment there was matter either morbid or abnormal. She had been waiting all her life for a forbidden excitement, an impossible experience; and now the thing, whatever it might be, was over and done with. She had appeased

the throbbing suppressed activities, had quieted and steadied her nerves, and lowered her temperature to the common blood point. How had she done it? Had excessive speed on her flying motor suddenly—as she promised—soothed her and calmed her? Perhaps, on some unfrequented track of a wide flat country road, she had gone two hundred miles an hour for a mile or a part of a mile; and in those few madly dangerous seconds she had satisfied the ill-defined but dominant cravings of many years!

Gladys had no wish to pierce the mystery. She wanted to help her friend, and not to understand her. Once or twice she was conscious of instinct's whisperings. Instinct would push aside reason, and whisper all the mystery—if she was not careful. She felt sure once that Irene's experience had been crushingly solid, and not bizarrely fanciful. Irene had been down into the unlit depths, had struggled in darkness with the unseen powers, had tasted of the bitterness of life and death. That was the essence of the change—reality in place of fancy. And from her escape out of the cruel grip of facts, she had brought back with her, perhaps, the knowledge of pain, the comprehension of sympathy.

Once she offered sympathy to Gladys: with her new voice, spoke of the great affliction that had befallen the house of Brentwood a year ago.

"I was so sorry," said Irene; and she would have kissed her friend. But Gladys recoiled from the sympathetic embrace. Fear mingled with a proud revolt against this unsolicited sympathy. She would help her friend, but she could not trust her.

"Gladys, you are my oldest chum—my best and truest chum. I was so sorry for you. Tell me about your grief——"

And again Gladys was afraid. If she encouraged Irene now —if she did not promptly silence her,—Irene would betray her own secret.

"I can't speak of it, Irene."

"Tell me what you suffered when you lost your baby."

"I can't speak of it to you, Irene. I—I can't speak of it to anyone."

"Poor Gladys. I see how you feel it still. I can guess how you suffered."

Irene did not further condole with her hostess, or press her implied requests for mutual confidence. The favor she had prayed for had been granted. And she said she was grateful. The cloud had been lifted for her: tongue-tied, bewildered, middle-class gossips could see her entering and leaving Andover House; she could soon stare Bayswater out of countenance.

She rushed no more in terrifying motor-cars. She rode a well-bred good-mannered hack very quietly and sedately. Early of a morning she used to jog or canter round the Park, among business men, civil servants, politicians, and doctors, taking a healthy exercise before their hard day's work began.

Sometimes she met Lord Brentwood, hacking for the good of his liver—and indirectly, of course, for the good of the Party: because occupants of front benches must keep themselves fit and strong. Sometimes the Under-Secretary rode with her for a little way, told her what they had done in the Lords yesterday, and what they hoped to do this afternoon.

But Irene would pull back her white-legged chestnut, and, smiling, turn his small head from Lord Brentwood's black-pointed bay.

"You are not to trouble to talk to me," said Irene. "You come here to think, and not to be bothered. I shall read every word you say about the Land Values' Bill;" and Irene slowly cantered away.

She wore a brown habit, which became her exceedingly well; she sat quite straight; and, so far as Lord Brentwood could judge, had light firm hands. Her long, willowy figure showed to advantage on horseback; her white skin did not turn red and hot; her bronze hair—rigorously bound and rolled—was splendid, and never got loose or untidy. Seymour, observing her improved looks, her schooled manner, and her considerate self-effacement when she dreaded she might bore people, could not regret that he had conferred upon Miss Malcomson a great and important kindness.

XXIII

THE western sun, shining through the painted faces of the kings and queens of England, sent feebly spreading shafts of light into the tank-like depths of the gilded chamber.

"Now, my lords, I must not weary you by going into unnecessary detail. . . . "

Seymour, seated in his accustomed place on the front bench, looked studiously at the space of carpet between his feet and the table. The shadow of the table, creeping across the floor, touched the toe-caps of his boots. That meant that the noble lord had been speaking for half an hour at least. He had carefully noted the position of the shadow when the noble lord began.

A slight sound came from the Peeresses' Gallery, and Seymour turned and looked up. A door opened and a pretty girl —with blue summer frock and hat full of flowers—came in, sat down; and shyly preened herself, arranging her white scarf and shaking out her lace. She was a newly married peeress—who had probably come here to fetch away her husband: to rescue him from the dull gray shadows, and take him with her into the sunlight. Seymour looked across the House, and saw her peer move from his seat and hurry out. When he looked up again to the Peeresses' Gallery, the blue frock and flower-bed hat were gone.

"My lords, it would weary you to no purpose were I to recapitulate. . . . "

But one lord, on the government bench, was weary already. Desperate nostalgic weariness had seized Lord Brentwood. He looked at the shadows, he looked at the clock, he looked at his watch. He wanted the talk to cease; he wanted to be free.

He felt a sudden longing for the companionship of his wife. He wished that it had been she, and not the girl in blue, who had come down to Westminster to rescue a weary lord from these tank-like depths. But Gladys could scarcely be expected to come here—at any rate, to-day. This morning there had been angry words, about nothing—or something not worth remembering. Now, in a moment, he longed to be with her,

to show her that he had forgotten all about the silly dispute.

If the debate would but wind itself up, he could spend an hour with her before dinner. He could find her in the Park, drive with her or stroll with her, give her every minute of his time till he dressed for dinner. And the nostalgic longing for fresh air and his wife's companionship grew stronger and stronger.

Why not spend the whole evening with her? He was engaged to dine with the hospitable lately created Lord Mildenhall of Carlton House Terrace—a big men's-dinner for the good of the Party. Why not chuck Lord Mildenhall and be free? He thought—while lord after lord stood talking for the Opposition—whether he should break his engagement or keep it; and at last, just as the man by his side rose to talk for the Government, he decided that he would give his evening to Gladys.

The front bench, the second bench, and the third bench were lost in shadow; the talk had ceased, the floor was littered with paper, peers were trooping out: the business of the day was over—it was twenty minutes to seven, time for their lordships to think of dressing for dinner.

Seymour hurried away—first to Andover House, where he heard that Gladys was out driving; then to Hyde Park, to walk up and down near Stanhope Gate and seek for her till he found her.

He found her carriage almost at once, but the carriage was empty. She was at a little distance, sitting under the trees, talking to a man. Her companion was Mr. Harold Ingram, and they were talking with animation—so much engrossed in their absorbing conversation that Seymour, threading his way through the crowd, could not attract her attention until he was close beside her.

He thought that Ingram was tactless and oafish in that he did not get up and go away, and he was irritated by the silliness of Gladys. She ought to have understood that he wanted her company, and that he could not enjoy it with this stranger hanging on to them. She stupidly invited him to sit

down, instead of suggesting at once that she would now return to the carriage.

"It is getting late," he said. "Don't you think we had better be going?"

"I am waiting for Schiller," she said. "He asked us to wait here for him. He went away to talk to some friends of his."

"Well but—how long ago was that?"

"Oh, a long time. He is sure to come back directly. It must have been half an hour—wasn't it, Mr. Ingram?"

"More than half an hour," said Mr. Ingram.

Lord Brentwood was forced to take a penny chair, and sit waiting with his wife and the tactless hanger-on.

"We can't wait for ever," he said presently. "Come along, Gladys."

Then, when his wife had charged Mr. Ingram with messages for the defaulting Schiller, she consented to be taken to the carriage.

In the short drive to Andover House, Seymour made no effort to show her that he had forgotten the disagreement of the morning. He was silent and thoughtful—not trusting himself to speak, until he could get rid of his new annoyance and irritation.

Now, and ever after, he disliked this Harold Ingram—first, because the man had wasted his brief free time and deprived him of his wife's society just when he wanted it; and secondly, because the man had hung on to his wife in a public place for rather more than half an hour.

He said nothing of his plan and desire to throw over Lord Mildenhall. At Andover House, Gladys found a pencilled note from her brother. Mr. Schiller had left this scrawl a few minutes ago. He was sorry, but friends were carrying him off, and he could not go back to the Park. He would, however, call for his sister at nine o'clock, and take her to a theatre.

Gladys was delighted.

"As you are engaged, I wanted him to spend the evening with me."

"Oh, very well," said Seymour irritably; and he went upstairs to dress for the banquet in Carlton House Terrace.

XXIV

LADY BRENTWOOD'S second evening-party was a success.

Mr. Marlow, in command, felt pleased with a really shipshape working—everything as it should be, from start to finish. If he had to make some announcements that rather surprised him, he was soon again reeling off the grand names which to him were so familiar. Seeing everything, noticing everything, he came to the conclusion that the hostess conducted herself with admirable propriety. She seemed to him quite the grand lady, and Marlow thoroughly approved of her.

When there were no more arrivals to announce, he went on an unobtrusive tour of inspection round the ground floor, casting his acute eye over supper tables and buffets. All as it should be—house-servants and his own regiment performing their duties with clock-work precision,—no guest running short of quails or champagne,—nothing to complain of anywhere. He stood for a little while by the end of a buffet, seeing everything and being pleased with all he saw—like a great commander watching his troops in action, he harasssed none of his lieutenants with needless orders or admonitions. Standing thus silent, watchful, discreetly inconspicuous, he was addressed in jovial breezy tones by one of the guests.

"Well, Marlow, how's the world going with you?" And Sir Gregory Stuart picked up a sandwich, and allowed a servant to fill a glass for him. "That's all right. . . . I have had supper, thank you, Marlow."

"You've not put anything in my way lately, Sir Gregory," said Marlow, with a sort of deferential familiarity. "Not been giving any big entertainments at Knightsbridge this season, Sir Gregory?"

"No," said Sir Gregory, jovially. "Nothing at all—or I should have called you in."

"Thank you, Sir Gregory. Always glad of a job—big or small."

"That's right, Marlow. Little fish are sweet."

It was plain that Sir Gregory and Marlow knew and under-

stood each other very well. In mere external manner Marlow was as respectful now as if he had been speaking to Lord Brentwood, but, piercing through the outward mask of deference, there was something rather insolent—enigmatic too, in its faintly marked assumption of friendly alliance rather than the ordinary link of patronage and employment. Red-faced Sir Gregory was never troubled by fine shades of manner, and, instead of checking, he encouraged a somewhat too friendly Marlow. They chatted together very easily while Sir Gregory ate his sandwich and drank his wine. No other guest was near them, and the servants were certainly too busy to listen.

"Many beautiful ladies here to-night, Sir Gregory."

"Yes, Marlow. But I pick one—all to nothing."

"Who is that, Sir Gregory? Her ladyship?"

"No—Miss Malcomson. Most attractive fascinating lady I've met for years."

"Tall young lady, in black and silver, Sir Gregory? Came with an elderly gentleman and a stout lady? . . . Yes, Sir Gregory, very handsome young lady indeed."

"That's the one, Marlow. I had the pleasure of bringing her down to supper;" and Sir Gregory, in a low voice, but with much enthusiasm, expressed his admiration of a co-director's daughter. "And so clever—brilliantly clever! I drink her health."

Miss Irene, emerging from her dark cloud, and bursting splendidly upon Sir Gregory, had completely dazzled him. He thought of those ugly stories; he stared open-eyed, wondered, admired; and immediately fastened upon Mr. Malcomson, craving for and obtaining the long-deferred introduction to his ladies. Mrs. Malcomson, dazzled for her part by the glories of Andover House, and rendered breathless by her plunge into good society, cordially welcomed the attentions of Sir Gregory. While Sir Gregory talked to her, she was able to recover her breath. Sir Gregory talked to her, but he looked at Irene; and, with such art as he possessed, endeavored to draw her into the conversation. Irene, however, was stately and unresponsive, or monosyllabically chilling. If quite aware that she had made a conquest of Papa's vulgar friend, she

was not apparently elated by this small triumph. Soon she took Papa away with her, and left Sir Gregory to take care of Mamma.

But Sir Gregory was not an admirer to be thus lightly shaken off. He followed her from room to room, and when supper time came, boldly offered himself as cavalier. Nobody else had asked her; so Irene haughtily consented to accept Sir Gregory. At supper she thawed very slightly, flashed her eyes once or twice, showed her white teeth in a smile, and still further subjugated Sir Gregory. He liked the glowing intense flash, and he liked the cold self-possessed insolence of this mysteriously fascinating companion.

"You are something in the city, aren't you?" asked Irene. "One of my father's business friends, aren't you? I have often heard of you, but I have never seen you before—have I?"

"No—unluckily for me," said Sir Gregory, looking at her, and openly, almost grossly, betraying his admiration. "I have very often heard of you, but this is the first time I have been privileged by seeing you. I could not have forgotten it."

"My father has so many business friends," said Irene, coldly and insolently, "and they're all so much alike. They think of nothing but money."

"Is it so wrong to think of money?"

"Oh, I don't know really. I never had any to think about. Who is the lady over there with Lord Brentwood?"

"I haven't the pleasure of her acquaintance. . . . Come now, Miss Malcomson, I can't let you dismiss me as one of those stupid people who have no ideas beyond money-grubbing. I value money for what it sometimes does for one—not for itself. I am quite different to your father's ordinary friends."

"Are you?—How?"

"I think of all sorts of things, besides money."

At the moment, he was thinking of all he had heard of this astoundingly attractive and hitherto carefully hidden young person. Was there any truth in the stories? Was there a solid foundation for the scandal? Sir Gregory, plainly showing his great admiration, thought that, with such a quantity of smoke, there must have been some fire.

"You talk about money, you know—just like the others;" and Irene smiled. "You can't drop the subject," and she looked across the room at a table by which the host was standing.

She made little pretence of listening any further to the voluble discourse of Sir Gregory. In his efforts to prove entertaining, he had made his usual mistake of becoming purely autobiographical.

"When you have had enough to eat, we'll go upstairs again."

Sir Gregory protested that he had no appetite, was lingering here only to prolong a delightful conversation.

"What were you telling me?" said Irene, rising. "Oh yes. About your adventures as a young man! Tell me the rest some other time."

"When may that be? I would like to tell you all about myself—in the hope that you'd think better of me. May I be courageous enough to call some afternoon—to-morrow?"

Irene did not answer this diffidently polite inquiry.

"I think my mother is listening to the band—in the gallery. Yes—I see her over there."

Then Sir Gregory found himself compelled to talk again to Mrs. Malcomson; and Irene joined her Papa, who was gloomily examining the pictures and wishing himself back in Bayswater.

Sir Gregory very soon roused Mrs. Malcomson from her chair, and bringing her with him, pursued Miss Irene. But Irene left him planted with her Papa this time, and moved off with Mrs. Malcomson.

Quite at the end of this successful evening-party, Mr. Marlow had an opportunity of closely observing the young lady in the black and silver dress. The guests were going fast, the hall was crowded, and Marlow stood at the foot of the staircase.

"Dare one speak to the prince now?" said Miss Irene, shyly accosting her host. "You haven't given me one word all the night—and I wanted to thank you for letting us come. It has been lovely."

Lord Brentwood smilingly and graciously accepted Miss Irene's shy little expressions of gratitude.

"Do something more for me," whispered Irene, "and I'll leave you in peace. Say a few words to Mamma and Papa."

"Yes—delighted—Where is Mrs. Malcomson?"

Mama and Papa, coming down the crowded staircase with Sir Gregory still in attendance, were close behind Miss Irene.

"I think you are the kindest of princes," she whispered. "Poor dears, they have loved it—but, don't you know, of course they felt like fishes out of water. If you speak to them now, they'll go home happy."

Marlow, observing the young lady of the bronze hair and the black and silver dress, also scrutinously considered her parents. With Sir Gregory they made a stationary group amidst the moving throng at the foot of the stairs, while Lord Brentwood talked to them most kindly and graciously; and Marlow thought that they were somewhat queer friends for his lordship. All right for Sir Gregory, but, in Marlow's swift judgment, out of place at Andover House.

"I'm glad you like the pictures," said Lord Brentwood, very graciously receiving Mr. Malcomson's heavy compliments. "But I'm afraid you saw some rubbish amongst them. Your daughter tells me you are a great collector."

"Oh, indeed no," said Mr. Malcomson modestly. "I have picked up a few things that I'm proud of—but they are all of the modern school—Not to be compared with your old masters."

Irene flashed upon Lord Brentwood one of her most intense glances, to tell him how grateful she felt for his condescension and civility to those poor dears, Papa and Mamma. And she pressed his hand very gratefully in taking leave.

Then Marlow saw Sir Gregory escorting her to the room where the ladies' cloaks lay stored and ticketed, and saw him bidding her good night when she and Mrs. Malcomson came out again—saw him lingering by her side until the Malcomson carriage was at the door.

An hour or two later, when Marlow went out into the empty street, clapped his hands at the corner, and drove away in his

brougham, he thought of Sir Gregory and the tall, bronze-haired young lady. Thinking of the assiduous attention he had observed in the hall, and of the satyr-like praises he had heard in the supper-room, he wondered if one could possibly be of any assistance to rich, red-faced Sir Grerogy in this very delicate little matter.

There was a bad side to the character of the useful Marlow, and his secret solitary thought was regrettably bad as he drove home to-night.

Next day the evening-party was described in many newspapers, with all the full detail proper to a social event of such great magnitude.

Seymour Brentwood, sinking now swiftly and unconsciously deeper and still deeper among the futilities, was well satisfied on seeing the space and prominent position given to it by *The Times*.

Here it was, in the middle, where *The Times* opened naturally—indeed fell apart to show it,—next to the Court Circular, on a level with the royal coat of arms.

"Lady Brentwood's Reception.

"The Countess of Brentwood gave an evening party yesterday at Andover House. Lady Brentwood welcomed her guests at the top of the grand staircase, and they then passed on to the reception rooms, which were decorated for the occasion with malmaisons and long streamers of roses sent from Collingbourne Court. Drayton's white Viennese orchestra played in the gallery outside the Vandyke Saloon.

"The Corps Diplomatique was largely represented, and included the French Ambassador, the Russian Ambassador, the Japanese Ambassador, the Danish Minister and Mme. de Brochner, the Swedish Minister and Countess Halmstad, the Netherlands Minister, the Mexican Minister and Madame Segura, Prince and Princess Wittenberg, Marquis and Marquise Torcello, the Norwegian Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. and Mrs. Boston-Farmer, and M. de Razilies.

"The general company included the Duke and Duchess of Wiltshire, the Duke and Duchess of Harrowmere, Augusta Duchess of Newport. . . . "

In nearly all the other newspapers it was as adequately and correctly reported. But in one newspaper—a Liberal newspaper too— a horrid mess had been made of it.

Seymour was annoyed by glaring blunders and idiotic inaccuracies. Scarcely a name in the long list had been spelt properly; up and down, wherever he looked, errors grieved his sight—from Countess Brentwood without the "of," to the bottom of the catalogue and Sir Gregory Sturt, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Marcorson.

The garbled list annoyed him excessively. He carried the newspaper to Mr. Roberts, his secretary, and charged him with neglect of duty. But Mr. Roberts said the newspaper was entirely to blame; the secretariat was altogether guiltless. Mr. Roberts declared that the greatest care had been taken in manufacturing accurately spelt lists for the representatives of the Press.

Lord Brentwood told Mr. Roberts that one could not be too careful.

Truly he had sunk very deep indeed. High above his head, the futilities were shutting out the last faint glimmer of light.

Sir Gregory Stuart spared no pains in endeavoring to improve his acquaintance with Miss Irene.

He knew only one method of ingratiating himself where ladies are concerned; and that was by giving presents. He sent a large bouquet of flowers to Mrs. Malcomson, and another to her daughter; and in the afternoon he called to inquire if they liked his offerings.

Mrs. Malcomson was delighted with Sir Gregory's graceful compliment, but the flowers made very little impression on Irene. She snubbed the visitor, and was as haughty as in the old days before her eclipse. Her kind friends at Andover House had helped her effectively: henceforth she could hold her head high, and a frowning father or a fan-waving Mamma was once again powerless to daunt her.

"Why," asked Mrs. Malcomson, "cannot you be civil to Sir Gregory? You know he is associated with your father."

"Is that any reason why we should associate with him?" said Irene contemptuously.

Sir Gregory, snubbed and rebuffed on the occasion of his first visit, called and tried his luck again after a couple of days; and, although Irene was no kinder, Mrs. Malcomson invited him to dinner at an early date.

"Your father," she explained to Irene, "told me he wishes to dine with us—and I must ask a few people to meet him. Now do, for my sake, treat him civilly."

It seemed that Sir Gregory himself pardoned Miss Malcomson for her haughty aloofness, and that the more rude she was the more he admired her. When, after the dinner, she sat—quite in her old style—on a gold-legged sofa at a distance from the other ladies, he came to her, humbly craving for snubs.

Mrs. Malcomson, nervously fanning herself, was relieved in mind when she saw that Sir Gregory had been permitted to get a gold-legged chair and seat himself by the sofa.

"Are you going to tell me the story of your life?" said Irene.

"No," said Sir Gregory, "I am only going to ask you why you think so badly of me."

"I haven't thought of you at all yet," said Irene. "Tell me something interesting and exciting—pick a chapter out of your life, and if I like it, I'll ask for the rest of the book in instalments."

"My best chapter hasn't happened yet—I am waiting for it to happen."

Irene looked at him calmly and critically, and smiled.

"Never mind the future, Sir Gregory. Tell me the things that have really happened."

Then Sir Gregory recounted some of his most surprising adventures: boastful expansions of fact, or vainglorious inventions—anything to arouse the young lady's interest.

"Yes," said Irene condescendingly. "I like that."

"Do you?" said Sir Gregory, delighted. "That's nothing to what's coming—the 'continued in our next number.'"

"Now tell me what you are doing with my father."

And Sir Gregory described how he and Papa had taken up the business of hotel-keepers and were making pots of money at their strange trade. They intended to revolutionize hotel-management, cater for all classes, save half the world from the trouble and waste of keeping private houses.

"It's you, of course," said Irene, "not my father. You are dragging him and the others after you."

Sir Gregory chuckled complacently.

"How did you make my father dash into something new, I wonder. He's the most old-fashioned man I ever met."

"He was very shy at first," said Sir Gregory, fixing his admiring gaze on Miss Irene's fine eyes. "Pooh-poohed me—kept me at arm's length—told me to go to the deuce, and not bother him. But I wouldn't take no for an answer. I'm always like that. Don't know when I'm beat—*won't* be beaten. That's my strength, Miss Malcomson—that's how I differ from other people. So in the end I prevailed with your father," and Sir Gregory bowed admiringly. "I always get my own way in the end, Miss Malcomson."

Irene smiled again.

"I think you are almost as old-fashioned as Papa, Sir Gregory. You don't deal in subtleties, do you? You are accustomed to coming straight to the point. And you are at your best when you are talking business."

Sir Gregory chuckled and rubbed his knees. It seemed that his rhinoceros hide was pleasantly tickled by any sharp things this fascinating young lady cared to launch at him.

"I am not clever like you, Miss Malcomson—You are brilliantly clever. I feel that you see through and through one."

"Stick to the point, please."

"Well then—I don't pretend to be clever, but I promise you I'm not a fool. Put me to the test—prove me."

Irene smiled, showed her teeth, and gratified Sir Gregory by signs of fully awakened interest.

"Go on talking business, Sir Gregory."

"Well, this is business—I am ready to make it the business of my life. I have been very useful to your father—now let me be useful to *you*."

And Sir Gregory offered to serve Miss Irene as a sort of modern knight. He would go out into the world and fight battles for her—he would do anything to please her. Young ladies, residing at home with their parents, often needed some trusty cavalier to manage little secret transactions for them. If she would trust him, honor him with any confidential commissions, he would perform them rapidly, secretly, and in a most business-like manner. He would ask no questions: he would simply obey her commands, and take pride and pleasure in the thought of his faithful service. Young ladies sometimes had private worries which they could not discuss with the kindest mamma, and then, if they knew some handy man of the world who was also a stout brave chivalrous knight—well then, they could turn to him to get them out of their little trivial difficulty. Young ladies naturally had private expenses, and the best of papas were sometimes close-fisted—

"I know that I should disgust you if I talked of money. But I really am making pots of money for your father—Now let me make some for you;" and Sir Gregory said he could supply invaluable stock exchange tips; he could tell Irene of mining shares which you might buy for a few pence, and which would be worth many pounds in a couple of months; he could start a speculative account for Irene that no one would ever hear of.

"Or I can tell you of solid investments—I'll do what I oughtn't to do—for *you*. I'll give you information about our hotels before the public can possibly get hold of it. Let me buy some of our Amalgamated Ordinaries for you—They'll be three points higher in a fortnight. Let me be useful——"

Mrs. Malcomson, delighted that her daughter had not frightened the wealthy and important guest, came across the room to reward Irene with grateful glances.

"Sir Gregory," said Irene, "has been telling me all about his conquest of Mexico. It seems rather a savage country still."

"It's such a long way off," said Mrs. Malcomson. "You don't ever think of going back, do you, Sir Gregory? You like England best?"

Sir Gregory said he liked England much the best; and, of all things in England, a quiet evening in charming society was that which pleased him most. He thanked Mrs. Malcomson for a great treat, and hoped that now he had been so kindly received in the family circle, he might be admitted again.

A few days later he wrote to Miss Malcomson, and the letter contained a check for two hundred and nine pounds. This amount, he said, had been gained by buying some Amalgamated Hotels Ordinary for the rise and selling them the moment they had risen. *"Don't tell anyone,"* wrote Sir Gregory, underlining the words. "Just a little secret between you and me. Yours to command. G. S."

By return of post he had Irene's unsatisfactory reply. Irene's big envelope contained his letter, his check, and nothing else. Irene by this discourteous treatment made him angry.

And when he called again at the Malcomsons' and contrived to get her to himself for a moment while her Mamma was talking to two matronly visitors, Irene made him more angry.

"If I employed you to do that sort of thing for me," said Irene, smiling contemptuously, "I should want bigger dealings than a paltry two hundred—and I should want you to draw your checks to bearer, not to order;" and she laughed in Sir Gregory's red face. "What did you do with the check?"

"I tore it up—and I hate tearing up a check I've written."

"Why didn't you scratch out the name, initial it, and send it to Miss Danby—Danvers—what's-her-name—you know, the girl who dances so badly in *The Moonbeam.* They say she has just lost the man who paid her bills for her—and she's dreadfully hard up."

XXV

LADY BRENTWOOD'S third evening-party was a failure. Everything went wrong; nothing was as it should be. Lord Brentwood's discontent increased throughout the evening, and unhappily much of the discontent was caused by his wife.

There was a dinner before the reception, and thirty people were expected. But the afternoon brought messages of apology from dinner guests.—Of three members of the Government who should have come, two sent apologetic excuses. They were ill and tired: their ladies must represent them. Then a husband sent telegraphic regrets. His lady was ill: he would come alone. Twenty-seven people instead of thirty, the sexes unequally balanced, too late to fill the gaps—very annoying. Gladys suggested that she might telephone to Lady Emily, and offered her brother Schiller and his friend Mr. Ingram as occupants of empty chairs. Seymour irritably refused.

"One can't ask people at the last moment—It is the greatest impertinence to invite anyone merely because somebody else has disappointed. It's never done—except by vulgarians."

"But a sister—and a brother! I am sure that Schiller won't be offended. And Emily is always so kind."

"I tell you—But you don't understand. It's never done—And we can't possibly do it."

"Oh, very well," said Gladys meekly.

"And look here," he said. "Emily *is* coming," and he made Gladys look over his shoulder at the dinner documents. "Her name is here—among the acceptances."

"So it is. I had forgotten."

Lord Brentwood dressed early to-night, and personally inspected the big dining-room. With his own hands he changed the position of some of the name-cards. He counted the twenty-seven chairs while he studied his list, and thought out the wisest and most proper rearrangement of the guests. He fancied that the one table looked far too long, and wished that he could have had four tables in its place. But this evening such a plan was out of the question. Directly after dinner Marlow and his myrmidons would be transforming the scene: the long table would be pushed towards the wall, and at once converted into a buffet.

Gladys had been urgently begged to be ready in good time—at least a quarter of an hour before the dinner hour. It is of vital importance that a hostess shall be established without fuss or hurry, calmly waiting for the arrival of her guests. An

Ambassador was coming, and he quite possibly would come long before the appointed minute. Punctuality is the politeness of princes, and their representatives sometimes embarrass one by an excess of this princely courtesy.

When Lord Brentwood went upstairs after counting the chairs, his wife welcomed him with a smile.

"Here I am, Seymour—and it is not yet a quarter past eight."

She was established in the reception room, waiting for the guests. That was right—but unfortunately something was wrong, annoyingly wrong.

"Seymour, why do you look at me so seriously? What is it? Oh, don't say that you aren't pleased with my new dress." But he had to confess that he was much displeased with it. The dress was a nice little dress in its way—blue satin and lace ruffle, like a dress in a picture by Reynolds or Gainsborough—but it was completely and distressingly inadequate to the importance of the occasion. In it Gladys looked pretty and young and graceful, but not at all a grand lady, wife of the sixth Earl of Brentwood, the hostess of Andover House entertaining for the good of the Party. She was wearing no jewelry—except the rope of pearls given to her by Lady Emily; and she had put some pink rosebuds in her fair hair—not an idiotic wreath of them, but a foolish dangling festoon. Really one might have imagined that she was some simple little débutante—a clergyman's daughter up from the country, or even the children's governess brought in to dinner to balance the sexes.

"I—I had it copied from that portrait—your ancestress—Gainsborough," said Gladys humbly. "I thought—I was sure you'd be pleased with it."

Seymour hastily explained—Very good idea, very nice dress, but utterly wrong to-night: altogether too simple—more especially by itself, without jewelry. And flowers in the hair—must be, surely, quite wrong to-night or any night. Then nervously he consulted his watch.

"Couldn't you run and change to something more appropriate?"

Gladys had flushed, and her lips trembled; she put her hands to her neck, and pulled at Lady Emily's pearl rope, almost as though she felt it strangling her.

"Yes—if you wish it;" and she hurried away.

"Only if you can do it in the time," he called after her. "You have fifteen minutes—barely fifteen minutes. Never mind, if you can't manage it."

She had not returned when the first guests arrived—the Ambassador came early. Lady Emily came early, and anxiously inquired for dear Gladys. Was dear Gladys indisposed? Each guest looked round the room in surprise. Many guests—nearly all the guests were assembled when the hostess made her appearance.

She was hot and flushed, and slightly breathless. But she wore all her jewels now—too many rather than too few: tiara, diamond collar, her three pearl strings, and blazing stars, glittering pendants right across the front of her bodice. Her dress was the grandest she possessed, of primrose-colored velvet, with a long lace-covered train to it. Through Seymour's mind a worrying doubt passed. She looked all right now—but was it not almost a solecism to wear velvet, of any color, in the height of the summer? Surely velvet belongs to the winter, and should be put aside by April at the very latest?

The unlucky absence of the hostess had rendered his task as host oppressively difficult. He had been obliged to talk to the ambassadress and other great ladies, and had been prevented from making certain introductions that were necessary. Now—hastily moving about the room, feeling driven by time, consulting his list, telling men the names of the ladies they were to take down to dinner—he suddenly confused himself. In his haste he had introduced two people who laughed and said they were old friends, and this trifling blunder upset him. He did not hear what people were saying to him. He answered at random: he was counting the guests again, and they made thirty-one; and when again he counted them, they made thirty-three. The guests kept moving, and of course he had counted one or two twice over. His trouble and perplexity increased. He had now told off all the men to the ladies and apparently

the sexes balanced. He could not find the odd lady. He looked at the list, at the company, at the open doors where Osborn stood waiting. The opening of the doors meant that dinner was ready. Down below, in the hall, the arrivals had been counted: Osborn's silent presence conveyed the message that everybody had arrived. Nevertheless, as Seymour passed the open doors, he questioned Osborn.

"Are you sure they have all come?"

"Yes, my lord."

Then, in an agitated and perturbed voice, he spoke to his wife.

"I think there is something wrong—I can't make it out. They seem to be paired off—*all* of them—but that *can't* be. Watch as they go down—and if you see where the mistake is—er—do what you can."

Then he gave his arm to the ambassadress, and led the dinner procession.

Two and two, the company descended to their allotted places at the long table, and seated themselves—that is to say, all but one of the guests. Two ladies were sitting side by side: a tall smiling man was walking round the table, in vain looking for a seat.

Only then did the nature of the mistake and the full extent of the resultant disaster disclose themselves to Lord Brentwood. Some hideous blunder had been perpetrated: his dinner list was imperfect. In sober truth the sexes balanced; there had never been a real odd lady: there were twenty-eight people at the dinner, and places had been laid for twenty-seven. Some name erased in error—some name never entered! Useless at this catastrophic moment to seek explanation, to apportion blame. But the list had been in the hands of Gladys; it bore her handwriting—she was undoubtedly guilty as accessory, if not as principal.

The guests did not mind; but Lord Brentwood did mind most dreadfully. Mr. Marlow felt overwhelmed with shame. Never in his splendid experience had such an untoward incident occurred. Footmen trembled. Mr. Osborn broke out in a cold perspiration. He and Marlow were alike guilty.—

They had counted in the hall, and had failed to discover the one too many. Guests cheerfully rising, moving a step to right or left, a dozen hands shifting wine glasses, twenty-eighth chair whisked into position—and then really this distressing incident was at an end. No one bore malice—not even the tall smiling chairless man: guests were seated again, unruffled, self-composed, chattering gaily, willing to enjoy their good dinner. Everyone could make light of it, treat the episode as an unimportant trifle—except Mr. Marlow, Mr. Osborn, and Lord Brentwood. *They* felt that they would never get over it.

The hostess sat at the middle of the table, with the Ambassador on her left hand and a Cabinet Minister on her right; and for a little while she paid less attention to these neighbors than to her husband, who sat immediately opposite. She could read in his face how vastly discomposed he was feeling. She smiled at him nervously and deprecatingly, even appealingly—as if saying to him with unspoken words: "Don't be unhappy. Forget the tragic accident, and pardon me for failing to avert it." It was a pity that the host and hostess were not separated by the whole length of the table.—If they had been thus widely removed, they could not have watched each other's facial expression or listened to each other's conversational efforts. But when people of the very highest importance are dining with you, it is necessary to mass them in clustered pomp, and your table becomes automatically a table of precedence. Nay, a *double* table of precedence—because, from the central seats of honor, you have two diminishing scales, that stretch to the far ends of the board and accurately measure rank and official status, until they record what is perhaps, comparatively, social insignificance.

As the meal progressed, Gladys grew less apprehensive and watchful. Seymour seemed to be recovering his equanimity. The Ambassador's wife was sprightly and vivacious; the Duchess of Newport was sensible and good-humored. His Excellency talked across the table to her—Seymour was presently talking quite cheerfully; and Gladys, reassured, prattled to the kind and fascinating Lord President. But soon His

Excellency lapsed from laborious, stumbling English into elegant, glibly rattled French. They all went on talking in French—and then Seymour winced, and again was made unhappy and uncomfortable.

Why in the name of reason must Gladys try to talk French too? She would do it—now and whenever an opportunity fatally presented itself. And she could not do it—she struggled bravely, and, from a stupid notion of politeness, always proved her total incapacity. He thought of what she had once told him: of her lesson-giving years ago—"French only preliminary." She had known her limitations then. Why could not she remember them now? Surely she might understand that this was not a favorable opening for preliminary French, delivered with a shocking British accent! Every word made him wince—he could not go on talking himself; he was tongue-tied.

Worse and worse—she was now telling His Excellency, *a propos de bottes,* idiotic stories of her preposterous brother; and His Excellency, with princely courtesy, was pretending to be interested.

"C'était dans la Canada"—and her eyes glowed with pride and affection.—"Sans dire un mot, mon frere a sauté dans l'eau pour sauver son ami—la vie de son ami—que était malade et ne pouvait se sauver lui-meme. Mais mon frere . . . etc. etc. Et je trouve que ca," said Gladys triumphantly, and her eyes were moist, and emotion made her voice quaver: "Je trouve que ca était—était tout a fait——"

"Magnifique, et d'un héroisme chevaleresque," said the Ambassador, simulating enthusiasm as well as interest.

"N'est ce pas?" said Gladys. But then she stopped abruptly—and looked scared and anxious. She had just seen the expression in her husband's face—sombre disapproval, sullen discontent, almost wrathful protest.

She spoke no more French, and very little English, till the meal was over and the ladies left the table.

The men soon followed them upstairs. In a quarter of an hour the transformation scene was being set by Marlow and his rapid scene-shifters. The long table had gone to the wall;

the room was nearly ready, with tea, coffee, light refreshments, for the guests of the evening-party. The supper rooms were all ready; the whole house was ready for the mob that immediately would begin to pour into it.

Upstairs, Seymour entered the big saloon with laggard men, and had joined Lady Emily and a group of ladies before he discovered that once more the hostess was not in her place.

"She had been called away," said Lady Emily,—"by somebody or something." The desertion had obviously shocked Lady Emily. "Osborn brought her a message. I think it is her brother—Mr. Copland—speaking to her on the telephone."

Lord Brentwood went in search of his wife, met her hastening back to her deserted post, and fretfully reproved her for this second dereliction of duty.

"You are making me so nervous," he said irritably, "that I can't attend to anything. Do, for heaven's sake, stay where people expect to see you——"

"Don't be nervous, Seymour—You, you make me nervous too."

Speedily, the evening-party was in full swing. Lady Brentwood in her place at the top of the staircase smiled, shook hands, without cessation. Outwardly, all was going well at Andover House. To an uncritical observer, there was nothing wrong—nothing that did not call for admiring approbation. Rarely could a more brilliant entertainment have been provided, to keep hard-working politicians and their wives and daughters in good temper.

Once more the Corps Diplomatique was handsomely represented; ribbons and stars made spots of color in the crowd; great noblemen in knee breeches stood side by side with Labor Members in baggy ill-cut trousers; great ladies in crowns and tiaras rubbed shoulders with honest house-matrons in black silk and embroidered fichus. Drayton's white orchestra gave forth sweetest music.

Old Mr. Copland, lingering at the top of the stairs to press his daughter's hand and beam upon her and shake his head sentimentally, declared that she had reached the summit of

glory. He said he felt like the parent of a Queen, watching all the world bow the knee to his dearest child.

Mr. Copland, wandering about the crowded rooms, soon found friends: his son Schiller for one; a member of Parliament also; Mr. Killick, the solicitor, with son, daughter-in-law, grand-daughter; and a few more. Mr., Mrs., and Miss Malcomson—having behaved with so much propriety on a first visit—had been favored by the unusual compliment of a second invitation within a fortnight. Copland greeted the Malcomsons effusively.

The Killicks, the Coplands, and their good friends, after being subdued, silent, and possibly ill at ease in the midst of the brilliant throng, now cheered and encouraged one another, and gradually began quite without restraint to enjoy themselves. Indeed, they made themselves rather too much at home. They all went down to supper together—among the very first batch, directly Marlow had thrown open supper room doors. Seymour, bringing down his oldest duchess, nearly suffered the dinner-trouble all over again in a worse form. It was with difficulty that he found a seat for his most august guest. Wherever he turned his eyes, he saw one or other of these humble friends firmly planted at a table. And while he was talking to his duchess, Mr. Schiller assailed him with boisterously friendly chatter. Schiller was painfully conspicuous—for a long time—at supper. He snapped his fingers to attract the servants, he called for food as in a restaurant, and he laughed and talked more loudly than is becoming in the rowdiest restaurant.

The host shivered as he heard him talking of the hostess to the young Mrs. Killick.

"Dear old Gladdie—she was always one of the best. The kindest sister—the truest pal."

Lord Brentwood, unable to leave his duchess, unable to drown Schiller's loud voice, was thoroughly disgusted. What could one do with such people? Was it fair to any man to force him to submit to their company?

When he got away from his wife's brother, it was only to be annoyed by his wife's father.

Copland, at another table, was telling Mrs. Malcomson that Gladys had inherited talents as well as virtues from her dear mother.

"You can remember Nathalie in her prime—you saw her act? Gladys has her voice—Yes, my little girl could have made her fortune on the operatic stage—but I would not allow it. I set my face against any public appearance. But her singing was our delight at home."

Then the host, passing, was hailed.

"Brentwood, my dear fellow, I have been telling Mrs. Malcomson that she must hear Gladys sing. You will endorse me—Gladys sings beautifully, doesn't she?"

Lord Brentwood nodded and smiled; and, with the fewest words required, passed on.

Nearly everybody had supped; the stream of arrivals, apparently, had long run dry; the crowd in the upper rooms was perceptibly thinner; many guests had gone, many more were going.

Drayton's white orchestra for a little while were mute—perhaps snatching a light repast ere again they produced music—or perhaps told to keep silent by a visitor making himself far, far too much at home in his daughter's house.

Then suddenly, from the end room beyond the Vandyke Saloon, came unexpected melody—the sound of a piano, and a girl's voice raised in song.

This was what had happened. Gladys had been lured from her post at the top of the stairs by Papa and Schiller and their exuberant irrepressible friends. Mr. Copland, flushed from supper, beaming sentimentally, pleaded that the hostess should come with them to some inner apartment—and sing them one little song.

"Do, Gladdie," cried Schiller. "Come. You can't refuse."

"My dear Gladys," said Papa, linking his arm in hers. "Gratify Mrs. Malcomson with one song—to please *me*."

The hostess begged to be excused; but Papa overcame her resistance, drew her away. The end room was quite empty.

In a few moments she was seated at the piano, surrounded by her friends, resolutely and, as it sounded, defiantly striking the chords of a noisy prelude. Outside the room a momentary hush fell upon chattering people. When she began to sing the verse of her ballad, people came crowding to the door. While she sang, people whispered and talked again; other people, hearing the music, thronged the gallery.

"Is it a concert? Who is it? . . . Our hostess? No, really?—How charming! . . . She was a professional singer, wasn't she? . . . Oh, I know this thing. It is what they are playing on all the street organs. It's a music-hall song, isn't it?"

Seymour, hurrying through the crowd, heard the questions; and, at the sound of his wife's voice rising strong and clear, bit his lip in anger.

Marlow, coming up the stairs, looked anxious and distressed. He was in charge of two late-arriving guests, but could find no hostess to receive them. Hostess gone from her post, singing a popular song—very unusual and distressing occurrence! Marlow, unable to make his announcement, led the late-comers towards the press of company at the end of the gallery.

And, with still louder chords, the singer finished her first verse and began the noisy refrain.

Seymour, threading his way through the crowd at the door, was pale with anger. He thought that his wife had brought ridicule and disgrace upon him; he thought that all the world was laughing at his wife, and at him because of his wife; he thought this singing outburst in the middle of an evening-party the most monstrous solecism that a human creature had ever committed. In his excitement and mortification he thought it sufficient to lose him his promised seat at the Cabinet table, to bring ridicule on the whole Liberal Government, to shake the confidence of the whole Nation.

And full and strong came the refrain—

"Life is what we choose to make it—vile or pure.
We can break the chains of habit—I am sure."

And Gladys, after some crashing chords, was ready to give them the second verse. But that was the end of the song—to-night. Seymour had reached the piano, and, pallidly smiling, he begged that other verses might be postponed. The presence of the singer was required—late-comers were awaiting her welcome.

When she had talked to these visitors and Marlow was relieved from his embarrassment, Seymour took her back to the staircase, and showed her his anger and disgust. Drayton's band was again supplying all the music necessary; and for a moment husband and wife stood alone, speaking low, with no guest listening to what they said.

"Seymour—You,—you forget. Please—please don't say such things to *me*."

"You must be out of your senses not to understand——"

"What is it? What is there to understand? I sang because they asked me."

"That's no excuse—to make a fool of yourself because they asked you."

"Seymour. Don't, don't say any more."——

Guests had drawn near, to bid adieu and thank Lady Brentwood for her delightful third evening-party. He could say no more then—if he had not said all he intended. He was immediately and continuously busy—escorting important dowagers as they descended to the hall, paying compliments to members of the lower House, graciously attending to one and all till the last guest had departed.

Most of the lights were out when he returned to the first floor. The night watchman, lantern in hand, passed him on the stairs. Servants were at work in the big rooms—already beginning to rearrange the furniture and obliterate all evidence of the festivities. His wife had gone to bed half an hour ago, without bidding him goodnight.

He paused for a moment outside the door of her room. He knew that she never allowed her maid to sit up for her. She would be alone in there—certainly not yet asleep. Should he go in and speak to her, explain at length why he had been

justly angry, and then pardon her? But he could not do it—he still felt too resentful. It was only a moment of irresolution; and then he moved away from the closed door, and went on to his own room.

She was in fact quite alone; and, without a maid to help her, had created a disarray that spread wide over chairs, tables, and sofas. Wardrobes and drawers stood open; her dresses, including the offensively simple blue and the grand but too heavy yellow, lay trailing; her pearl chains and diamond stars were tumbled in a careless heap. She had been ransacking all tidy repositories, turning her store of costumes upside down, in a reckless unaided search. Now the search was done: she had dragged out the garments for which she sought.

So, if Seymour had acted on his first instinctive impulse and come into the room, he would have found his wife kneeling on the floor before a wardrobe, clutching a shabby old dress in shaking hands, and silently, bitterly weeping. If his memory served him well, he would remember that this incredibly humble skirt and bodice together formed his wife's wedding robe. She had hidden and treasured it for a long time; and now she had brought it out in the middle of the night, to weep over it.

XXVI

IN the morning she was gone.

His valet, dressing him for his early ride, buttoned the breeches, buckled the boot-garters, and strapped the spurs with clumsy, nervous fingers, but said never a word. As he came out of his room, two housemaids looked at him curiously, and one of them let fall her broom. On this and the ground floor, servants were whispering; below, in the vast basement, they were talking noisily yet fearfully. Wonder, doubt, and trepidation flew high and low, till they filled the great house. Only the master of the house was in ignorance of what a very strange thing had happened.

Lady Brentwood's maid in frightened tones told him the startling news.

"My lord, may I speak to you?" and the woman, coming to the head of the staircase, leaned over the gilded balustrade —"I *don't* know what to do—or if I was expected to pack and follow. Her ladyship left me no orders. I thought perhaps her ladyship would have asked you, my lord, to say what I was to do."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

Then the maid stated the cause of her perplexity. Bed not slept in; room in confusion; my lady gone out—walking costume—very early in the morning.

"She had a dressing bag with her—but nothing else. Mr. Jarvis called the cab for her, and carried the bag out."

Lord Brentwood's surprise robbed him of diplomatic caution. He came upstairs again, went with the maid to examine the disarranged room, stared stupidly at pearl chains and primrose-colored velvet, searched for a letter of explanation, asked questions and did not listen to the answers.

"Hasn't she left some message for me? What time, do you say? Who saw her go?"

And high and low about the great house, there flew, with mysterious speed, the latest news—to confirm surmises of whispering servants. "Have you heard? —His lordship didn't know. Never guessed she was gone. Fairly knocked over when Miss Vickers told him. There'll be a nice kick-up, I'm thinking, before we get to the end of this job."

"Where's Jarvis?"

My lord was calling for the night watchman; and unseen eyes observed him while he talked to this old retainer.

"Her ladyship come down 4.9 a.m. soon after it was light" —The night watchman offered his evidence in a low, firm voice, gravely and impassively.—"And gave me the order to fetch a cab. I asked if it was to be a four-wheeler or hansom; and her ladyship said, No consequence, the first I could find; and I might close my door, as she would sit in the hall guarding the door and let me in."

"Yes, yes. Well, you got a cab?"

"I was gone seventeen minutes. I tried Park Lane, but never found one till I was round in Piccadilly. It was a four-wheeler, and I came back with it—on the box. Her ladyship gave me the bag to be put inside, and I asked for the order: Where to. But her ladyship said 'Drive on,' and the cabman done so."

"Which way did the cab go?"

"Down the street, into the square—and then stopped. I saw the cab stop, and my lady put her head out of the window—as I supposed, giving the order Where-to. That, my lord, was all I saw. The cab went out of sight, north side of the square. Time—4.31 a.m."

And Jarvis folded his hands, looked at his employer gravely, respectfully, and staunchly, seeming as if he would say; "I am the watchman of Andover House. All things seen by me in the silent night I can and do report to you; but the inner meaning of these things I may not know, I dare not learn."

His lordship went into the library, and walked up and down the long room, thinking, or trying to think. What in the name of reason could she mean by this astounding escapade? Had she been called away by her father or her brother? Some illness, or money trouble, of an old friend? But she must be mad to rush off without a word—No, it was nothing of that sort. . . . It was something worse than that—it was high treason, revolt against him, her lord: a wicked plot to humiliate and annoy him, because he had reproved her folly and because she would not bear reproof. What should he do? He was truly as perplexed as her maid.

Anger, perplexity, and then fear, prevented him from thinking clearly. Doubt and suspicion and quick-pressing dread of impossible catastrophies took possession of his mind. He must do something—and he was only pacing to and fro, biting his lips, and slapping his boots with a cane.

For twenty minutes by the library clock, he suffered torments of anxiety; and then his brief punishment was over. A messenger had arrived with a letter for him, from his runaway wife.

She had written the letter at King's Cross, the Great Northern terminus, and this was all she said:—

"I have gone to Dykefield Castle—to be far away, where I can't disgrace you. Don't send after me. Please don't follow me. Let me stay in the house you gave me—the world forgetting, by the world forgot. Gladys."

He told the servants that Lady Brentwood had been unexpectedly summoned to Yorkshire on business; that he himself would be going by a night train; that they would both be back by to-morrow evening. The servants were glad to have this cheerful news, but they went on whispering and chattering. "Not perhaps such a rum start as it seemed at first. But, mark my words, we aren't near the end of it yet."

The bay horse was not to be sent away from the door: his lordship would take his ride. That was a favorable sign. His lordship would not require his valet to go to Yorkshire. That was an unfavorable sign. His lordship was studying the A.B.C. guide, and writing telegrams. More in this rumpus still than meets the eye! Coming home again to-morrow? Well—yes, we shall believe that, when we see her.

She had missed the 5 o'clock train, and had travelled by the train that leaves at a quarter past seven—Seymour worked this out from the A.B.C. She had not despatched her letter until there could be no chance of interference with her flight. He would have wished to fly after her, get a special train, and overtake her—catch her perhaps at the junction between York and Dykefield, and bring her back as a captive before she had seen her castle walls. But this was impossible. He had his day's work before him—the affairs of the nation: business at the Public Office, deputation to receive for his chief; attendance at sitting of a Royal Commission of which he was deputy-chairman; sitting of the Lords; and dinner-party at the house of a Cabinet Minister, where the fugitive was also due, and where her absence must be explained. He could not leave London till his work was done.

One of his telegrams was to the bailiff of Dykefield. He informed Mr. Mallock that he would reach Dykefield to-

morrow morning, and he further told Mr. Mallock to convey this information to Lady Brentwood on her arrival.

All day long he went about his work—a man bursting with resentment and indignation. It was fortunate that the high State affairs upon which he was engaged could be performed automatically and almost without thought; for in truth he had no thought to give them.

He glanced at the newspapers, and saw, but could not read, the full accounts of Lady Brentwood's reception at Andover House. He felt a horrible dread of the newspapers—not now of their blunderings and inaccuracies, but of their overwhelming power, their numberless correspondents, their wide-reaching system of news-collection. What could the evening papers have to say about Andover House? "It is rumored that the Countess of Brentwood has left London, and that uncertainty prevails as to her destination. We trust that the natural anxiety of friends and relatives may soon be relieved!" that was the sort of thing some unscrupulous rag might publish. The good, self-respecting newspapers would merely record the departure—yet that alone might be sufficient to do him irreparable injury, by setting all scandalous tongues clacking. But if a ruffian-journalist—a caitiff spy from the camp of political adversaries—got wind of the facts, he might basely distort them; he might gleefully risk a criminal libel action, in order to tarnish the fame of a prominent member of the Liberal Ministry. And what horse-whippings or actions by law could bring one redress? Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion.

As he drove through the streets in the afternoon, he looked at newspaper contents bills with a childish apprehension of seeing monstrously absurd legends: such as, Flight of Countess of Brentwood, Disappearance of a Peeress, or Wife runs away from Member of Government. There was nothing on the news-vendors' boards, or in the notices and order of the day at the Lords, or in the faces of colleagues, friends, and strangers, to tell him that the world knew anything of his little domestic worry; but, nevertheless, hour by hour his discomfort increased, his anger grew deeper.

If there were never any public revelation, if no one ever

hard of it, the crime of Gladys would remain as great. By her inconceivable folly, she had jeopardized his reputation and his peace; recklessly, lightly—indeed, with appalling levity,—she had imperilled his status in the Party and her own position in Society.

His anger was unabated when at last the day had ended and he was speeding northward in the night express. He could not sleep: he could only think of his wrongs. Folly—that was the best one could say for her. But folly of such extent is nearly as bad as premeditated guilt. And ingratitude—could one possibly exaggerate the vastness of the ingratitude?

He thought of how good he had been to her. Was ever a man quite so good to any woman since the universe began? She was poor and humble, and he made her rich and great. She was unhappy, lonely, forsaken, and he took her by the hand and made her his wife. His wife! Nothing less. He had lavished gifts upon her—furs, jewels, money without count. This castle of Dykefield to which she had rebelliously fled—what a noble gift! In no circumstances would he ever remind her of his goodness. He had never thought of it before. But now he could think of nothing else—all the way in the flying train, for two long hours at York station in the cold morning light; and again as he went slowly onward, across the flat meadow-lands, past many sleeping towns and waking villages, towards the sunlit, wind-swept moors.

Surely she might have remembered his goodness to her! He thought of the swift turn of fortune that laid the world at his feet, and of the temptation to throw her over and seek a more suitable mate. But he had not yielded. How good that was of him. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have been faithless, if so put to the test. Again he thought of how good he had been in his civility to his father-in-law He had even submitted to the brotherly friendliness of the idiotically-named Schiller. How good to let old Copland decorate and half furnish his house—how good to pay Copland's bill without a murmur of protest. A preposterously heavy bill—greedy hands plunged deep in open pockets! He

had never mentioned the extortionate amount to Gladys—how good! And once again, how good he had been to her throughout the course of her long, wearisome illness. What husband had ever shown more perfect goodness to an ailing wife?

These were his thoughts, through darkness, dawn and daylight, all the way from King's Cross to the red-roofed town of Dykefield, Yorks. In all the journey, he had not, curiously enough, one thought of her goodness to him.

He found her in the small court, outside the bailiff's lodgings. There was a little group of people by the bailiff's door—a child mounted on a donkey, a homely stout woman, a white-haired old man; and a tall slender girl, who was talking to the child and smiling at the old man. The girl was his wife; and, at sight of her, his heart melted and for a few moments his anger was all gone.

She was wearing what Jarvis had described to Miss Vickers as a walking costume, and it was very simple, even shabby. Black hat and pink roses, black blouse and white spots, black serge skirt—Seymour recognized the now unfashionable costume. This was her wedding dress. Thus she had looked when she stood by his side at the altar rails. Thus, exactly, she had looked at their first daylight meeting, when she came towards him with firm light footsteps, and gladdened his eyes and quickened his pulses and warmed his blood in pleasure and hope.

"Seymour! You have got here sooner than we expected you."

When she spoke to him, his resentment returned as strong as ever. Her greeting should have been different. In tone and manner she should have conveyed a supplication for pardon.

"This is Mr. Mallock." She introduced the bailiff as though he had been an old and valued friend. "And this is Mrs. Grange—Mr. Mallock's daughter,—who has done everything for me, and made me most comfortable. And this is Cicely—Mrs. Grange's little girl. She is like you, Seymour—she goes for morning rides," and she patted the child's bridle hand.

"But my husband doesn't ride a little animal like yours, Cicely. He rides the high horse—a big prancing creature that I'm afraid of,—in ugly stupid London."

Mr. Mallock had taken off his panama hat, to show Lord Brentwood his white hair, and he nodded and grinned cheerily.

"You're heartily welcome, my lord," said Mallock with a loud North-country voice. "'Tis what I've been hoping for a mighty long while—that some of you would give us a turn one day."

"Indeed and you're both welcome," said Mrs. Grange, with nods and grins. "That's a true word of father's. He's said it ever since I was no bigger than Cicely there: Surely to goodness you'd give him and the old place a turn *one* day."

Mallock was a splendid old man—solid, erect, and vigorous, after a bailiffship of forty-two years. His blue eyes were keen and bright; his high cheek bones were the color of weather-worn red bricks; his voice was strong and noisy. In his manner, there was not the vaguest hint of that obsequious deference to which Lord Brentwood had become accustomed.

"'Twas about time," he said, with a friendly grin; "'twas time. And I hope you and my lady will stay with us a bit, now you *have* come."

"Thank you," said Lord Brentwood. "But I fear that we cannot stay—on this occasion."

"Won't you stop a few days?" asked Gladys. "Mr. Mallock has so many things to tell you," and she glanced at her husband's face.

Seymour thought now that, though she bore herself defiantly, she was in fact contrite and abashed. She dreaded the approaching interview; she knew that he could not reproach or upbraid her until they were alone; and she clung to these people because, in spite of her air of bravado, she dreaded his just wrath.

"You'll be wishing for some refreshment, my lord," said Mr. Mallock. "You'll be hungry after your journey."

Fatigue, sleeplessness, and anger had weakened Lord Brentwood, and taken dignity from him. He stood in the bright

sunlight; and, to North-country eyes, looked pallid, haggard, and feebly sullen. He spoke hurriedly and nervously; cleared his throat and stammered; turned from Mallock abruptly, and scowled at the woman, the child, and the donkey.

"Have you had breakfast, Seymour?"

"Yes—no. I am not hungry. Come with me, please. I want to talk to you."

Then his wife left her protecting audience, and went with him through the archway into the garden court.

"Well, Seymour? You are very angry with me, I suppose?"

"Yes—Haven't I cause?"

"It is what I told you I would do. You were ashamed of me. You showed it in a dozen different ways. And I told you —I promised you—if you showed me that, I would leave you."

"Listen to me, please. When I let you see I was annoyed——"

"What harm had I done? Because I don't speak French as cleverly as you do—because I ventured to sing—when they asked me! *You* have never asked me. Not once—from the day you married me. You said you liked my voice—but somehow you never wished to hear it again."

He was surprised by this absurd attack, and for a moment he searched his memory.

"If I haven't asked you—you knew very well that I should have liked you to sing to me, when we were alone—or with intimate friends."

"You never once thought of asking me. I waited—and I wondered."

"If you are silly enough to be offended—But I'm not going to discuss such nonsense now. This is serious."

"Yes, I am serious too."

"You had better understand that I am in earnest when I say——"

"Yes, but you must understand that I also am in earnest."

They walked side by side, to and fro, along the pavement beneath the yew trees. They stopped and leaned their arms upon the parapet, looked out over the peaceful plain to the

distant hills, saw the pretty view without seeing it, stood confronting each other and then walked on, side by side again, while accusation, defence, argument continued.

"I tell you that you must come back with me this afternoon."

"And I tell you, Seymour, that I am sorry, but I can't do what you ask."

"It is not a request. It is what I have a right to command. You seem to forget that I am your husband."

"You seem to remember it rather too late."

Suddenly he became conscious that in this unworthy wrangle she was beating him. He had come to bully her or to conquer her rebellious spirit; and she would not be bullied, her spirit was unconquerable.

"Listen to me, Gladys. You must listen to me—and understand."

"How often are you going to say that, I wonder. I do listen. What is there to understand? Do you know that scarcely a day passes but you say that to me. I know what it means now. I think I understand too well. You mean, every time you say it, that I have been ignorant and stupid—and put you to shame;" and she laughed bitterly. "How often have you blushed for me in the last month, Seymour?"

She laughed, but he knew now that she too was in earnest, bitterly in earnest.

"I—I have never blushed for you. You know how proud of you I have been. But you can destroy my pride, by bringing scandal and ridicule——"

"How can there be any scandal because you are in London and I am in Yorkshire? I knew you'd think of that *first*—if you ever thought of anything else afterwards. What the world would say! Would there be talk? I came here—to prevent talk, to avoid the possibility of scandal. I would have gone back to my common family—to my humble—my disgracefully humble father—but then people would have talked, and *you* would have suffered. Don't be afraid, Seymour. There'll be no scandal."

"Your place is with me. If you leave it——"

Tears filled her eyes as she turned to him; and she spoke sadly, and not defiantly as hitherto.

"Let me stay here, Seymour. You don't want me. No, don't pretend. You haven't wanted me for the last year—ever since our child died. I'm no use to you. I'm in your way. Go back and leave me here. Go on with your career."

Then, ceasing to issue commands, he begged her to be reasonable, and to believe that he did want her—that he could not possibly do without her.

"Am I really unreasonable, Seymour? Think for me, as well as for yourself . . . No, it's no good talking. I can't do it. I can't live with you unless you are kind to me."

"*Kind!* Do you mean to tell me—can you say that I have been unkind to you?"

"Yes, I think you have been hideously unkind."

He stared at her in angry astonishment, but he was staggered by the force with which she made her answer.

"Is it kind to break your bargain, to forget our bond?" She spoke now almost violently, till sobs stopped her; and then she clutched at the bosom of her shabby old dress, and gasped for breath. "Hideously unkind—wickedly forgetful! You knew who I was and what I was. I told you not to marry me—and you would. You said you loved me more than anything. You wanted me—nothing else, nothing different. And now—because I am what I am—you are cold and cruel and angry. You said we were to live for ourselves—and nothing outside ourselves mattered—And I have given up everything. I have tried to please you—cried myself to sleep because I failed—prayed to God for this one thing—just to be able to please you."

"Gladys—my dear girl—you have pleased me. I never—at any time—meant to be unkind to you."

"Didn't you? Then that's worse. To wound me every day, every hour—and not know or care!"

Their relative positions had reversed themselves in an illogical and unsatisfactory manner. She was the accuser, and he was on his defence.

"Gladys, be reasonable. You are not thinking what you say. You'd say anything now to justify yourself—however unfair to me."

He was shaken by her passionate outbreak. He was compelled to defend himself, and instinctively he drew materials from last night's thoughts. Indignantly, and yet weakly, he began to recite his varied kindnesses.

"Yes," she said presently, "but that wasn't our bargain. You promised to give me love, not money."

Then he reminded her of his constant attention,—his unceasing kindness, when she lay ill.

"Yes, you were kind to me then—very kind. But that was a year ago. Ever since then you have been changing. Perhaps you don't realize yourself how greatly you have altered. There are days on which I can hardly believe that you are the same man. You think differently—not only about me. The things you once despised are now all you care for. The things you once loved you now neglect—not only me, everything. It's your career, I suppose. Well, let me go out of your life—and you'll have a clear stage."

She was strong, and not weak.—He made the discovery to-day once again. She was gentle and yielding, up to a fixed point; but, beyond that limit of softness, she was a granite wall, cemented with pride, rebelliousness, and obstinacy.

"Leave me here in the house you gave me."

"I didn't give it you to use as a weapon against me."

"It is your house, not mine. You may reclaim it when you choose. I have not forgotten the trust. I am your trustee—even if you don't trust me."

"I do trust you."

"But I mean, let me live here. Seymour," and she put her hand on his arm. "I swear to you I would come if you summoned me—if you were ill or in trouble—if you really wanted me. It's all summed up in that. You don't want me. . . . Get Lady Emily to help you—she understands. She won't disgrace you. Arrange it how you like. Say I'm ill, and need rest and quiet. No one will talk—no one will notice or think it strange. Or send me somewhere else, if I

mayn't stay here. Let me go right away. Let me go to Canada with my brother and stay there."

The day wore on, and still she would not yield. The Castle walls threw their shadow to the verge of the river, and still she defied his authority, obdurately refused to obey him. There had been more tears, but no wavering of her obstinate will; and now she was walking alone in the garden court, and he was watching her from a room of the old Tudor house.

She sat on a stone seat beneath a yew tree, got up, and shading her eyes with her hand, looked out across the peaceful fields, and then walked slowly and wearily up and down by the parapet. As he watched her, he wrestled with his angry thoughts, struggled hard to retain hold of them—because he felt that they were slipping away from him.

She moved slowly and wearily—she was unhappy. And who was to blame? Nobody but herself. No one else. But she looked fragile, weak, and humble—at a little distance. In here, in the panelled parlor just now, she had been strong and proud enough in all conscience! But she was really unhappy—her gait and the languid droop of her arms made one sure of that. As he watched her, he looked back into the past—and saw her, a lonely friendless girl, putting her life into his hands and trusting him to guard, cherish, and be kind to her. . . . That was her wedding dress.

The dress beat him. He could not go on fighting her poor little shabby old dress.

"Gladys." He had gone to the window, and was calling her. "Gladys—please come in here again."

When she came into the room, he stood waiting for her with outstretched arms.

"Gladys," he said huskily. "I—I am sorry I spoke unkindly to you. But you—you mustn't mind. You must never think of leaving me—because I am your husband, and the father of your dead child."

They dined together at York railway station, and came back to London together in a reserved compartment on the 9.50 train.

It was a complete and highly satisfactory reconciliation. She had promised to return to the Party stronghold and try again—try her very hardest to please the Government, society, and Seymour.

"I'll do anything you tell me," she vowed.

And he said she was to do anything she liked, and, whatever it might be, it should be liked by him.

"But you must teach me, and not snub me and frown at me—or just shrug your shoulders and say I don't understand. I *can* understand, Seymour. I *will* understand, for your sake."

In the London express, after their pleasant friendly dinner, she renewed her promises and told him how very unhappy she had been.

"*Miserably* unhappy, Seymour—these last months. I felt that I couldn't live without your love—and that it was gone for ever. And I did, did try—though I failed. I knew it was wrong to sing to them. But I'll tell you what I thought. I can tell now. I thought you had been cruel—you know, about the wrong dress—and those rose buds. Seymour, my darling, I got those to put in my hair—only just to remind you of the past, when you praised me for this hat. . . . It was silly of me to think you'd remember. But I *was* so unhappy. . . . So then, when Papa said I must sing—knowing quite well it was wrong and stupid,—I thought I'd do it—and sing that one particular song. I was heart-broken really—quite desperate. But I thought, if you heard it, you'd remember, and be touched—and come and speak kindly to me." And, twining her arms round his neck, she leaned her face against his, and sobbed. "But you didn't, Seymour. You were stern and cruel and very very angry. . . . It was all my fault, dear. But now I promise, I'll do everything you wish. Only be kind to me—be kind."

The train rushed through the soft dusk of the summer night, the summer air blew upon them, as she lay in his arms, wetting his face with her tears. And he held her close, and pressed her tight against him; and for a little while—it was only a glimpse—he saw the light. Some faint rays reached him,

and for a space of time—minutes if not hours—he could see objects in their true proportions, and correctly estimate their bulk and value. Shadow and substance separated; trifles were trifles, and no longer worth considering; facts that had seemed insignificant showed themselves large solid matters of vast importance.

XXVII

THEY left London immediately after the prorogation, and went for a happy vagrant tour on the Continent. It was like a second honeymoon—the expensive honeymoon that Gladys had refused. They travelled in a costly manner, but without the least pomp—reserved compartments, deck cabin, first-floor rooms, and so forth, but no special trains, private steamboats, or conspicuous extravagance. They had but three servants with them;—intended to take only a man and a maid; but Mr. Marlow, officiously insistent on the eve of their departure, brought to Lord Brentwood the most highly-trained courier now living. He happened to be disengaged at the moment, after conducting the Duke of Newport up and down Europe for five months; and Marlow thought it would be a thousand pities if Lord Brentwood did not save himself trouble by employing this talented creature. M. Poirier was undeniably useful: he bought railway tickets, paid bills, registered the luggage, reduced Lord Brentwood's personal cares to the writing of a check—in a word, he nobly endeavored to give his lordship a real holiday after the fatigues of an arduous session. And if, when my lord and my lady were slowly ascending the Rhine in *bateau a vapeur,* or rolling on dusty Swiss roads in an extra-poste carriage, M. Poirier rushed ahead by the grandest *vitesse* of Prussian or Federal train, and made a little bargain on his own account with one of two rival hotel-keepers, it did not detract from his usefulness. Money was no object—as he hastened onward to tell the manager of the Three Crowns or the Tellerhof: "I have, a little way behind me, the Lord Brinvood—paire et presque prince d'Angleterre, membre du gouvernement de sa majesté britannique—et suite—

to dispose of for two or three days. . . . What can you afford me in benefices particular to myself if I make them to descend here?" Mr. Poirier was on the river quay, or on the dusty high road outside the town, to welcome the travellers when they arrived. He had made his bargain, unpacked luggage, ordered dinner; had bathed, changed his clothes; and now looked, as he was, a courier worthy of a prince. "I have secured apartments, my lord, at the Three Crowns—the only house in the town."

"Three Crowns—all right! But I thought you said the Tellerhof was the best hotel."

"Pardon, my lord. I said the Tellerhof was overrun by the Germans—and lost his reputation. Impossible at present. A vile management, and counted by all a second-class house. My lord will be well content with the Three Crowns."

What did it matter? Money was no object. Marlow would never have recommended Poirier as a poor man's servant.

Guarded and guided by their inestimable Poirier, they wandered here and there very easily and comfortably. The Rhine countries, Switzerland, the lake of Constance, Austria and the Tyrol—they were on the beaten tourist-track, or a very little distance from it, all the time. Nothing new, scarcely a town with which Seymour was not already acquainted;—but it had been tacitly understood that this was Gladys's treat; everything was new to her; and her kind husband showed himself willing to go wherever she pleased. In September they would stay on the Italian lakes; and then, when the days grew shorter and cooler, they would wind up their holiday at Venice. *That* was to be the crowning treat for the untravelled Lady Brentwood.

They were happy companions once again, talking of ideas and not of things, of books written by dead men, instead of gowns worn by living women, looking at pictures, churches, mountains, instead of at snap-shots in illustrated journals. Poirier made them free, saved them from petty worries: Cook's tourists could not have been more independent, or personally, less ostentatious. They walked about lamp-lit streets, rode

in electric trams, left their luxurious hotels, and dined sometimes among the humble city-folk, in little restaurant gardens by a riverside.—It was almost, if not quite, the same companionship as in that summer time which seemed so long ago to both of them, before Seymour was great and rich and famous.

English travellers they saw in thousands, but not the sort of compatriots among whom they would encounter friends. Once or twice Lord Brentwood was recognized, and stared at in open-mouthed admiration. An American lady at Schaffhausen introduced herself as a contributor to the *New York Herald,* and begged for the favor of his candid opinion of the Rhine. Over-rated, or up to expectation—which? Whatever Lord Brentwood thought of this much-advertised stream, the lady was prepared to cable right through to the States for the home edition. Two young ladies at Nuremberg, in charge of Cook, swiftly turned their Kodaks from the picturesque over-hanging houses and many-windowed roofs, and with ardor snapped Lord Brentwood until their spools were wound off. The consul at Bamberg called upon Lord Brentwood, after cashing one of his checks; and expressed the hope that he was feeling healthy and robust, in spite of the great heat of the last few days. If Lord Brentwood would send the English world of rank and fashion to visit this salubrious neighborhood, it would be a kindness to the town and its banker-consul.

After Nuremberg and Bamberg, where they lingered for two or three days, they found themselves very near a summer haunt of innumerable members of the best London society. They were within fifty miles of Marienbad. Two hours by train, as Poirier advised them, and they might descend among many friends—might warm themselves in the rays of British society's light-giving Sun. The kindly orb was shining over there, with its annual, easily approachable, and yet still effulgent radiance.

It seemed perhaps a pity not to go over—and stay a week or a fortnight, see the place, see one's friends, and then move on again. What did Gladys think? What would Gladys like?

Gladys thought and said she would like to go in the oppo-

site direction—anywhere except to this fashionable health resort.

"No," she said, contradicting herself. "I don't mean that. It might amuse you. Yes, if you feel the least inclination——"

But Seymour would not allow her to change her mind. Poirier had been ordered to turn his back on Marienbad, to book a coupé in the train for Salzburg, to carry them down the map to the south-east, over the Danube and the Inn.

She was very happy in the train as it bore them away, though she reproached herself at first for her selfishness.

"Seymour, do you mind? Are you sure you didn't want to go there?"

"Oh, no," he said. "I was glad you decided against it. I feel that I need rest—I don't want to see people. I am tired out."

And soon he leaned his head against the padded cushions and fell asleep. And Gladys watched him while he slept; admired his beautiful profile, the ridge of his brow, the gray strands of his close-cut, but naturally curly hair; pulled down a window blind to shade his eyelids; and looked out at the gliding landscape till her eyes filled with tears.

She thought that she had won him back—her dear companion. They two were all-sufficient, one to the other.

She might do what she pleased, say what she pleased. She spoke to him once of sister Nathalie and her husband. Nathalie had sent her a delightful long letter from Brisbane. Everything was well with Nathalie: Mr. Reed's business was immense; children, burstingly vigorous, were growing up—old enough for parents to leave them without too sharp a heartache. Possibly Mr. and Mrs. Reed would come home next year for a trip to the old country.

"How jolly," said Lord Brentwood.

"You wouldn't mind?"

"I have told you, I would mind nothing that *you* liked."

He did not want to see people that he knew, but was increasingly anxious to see his letters. Bundles and packets

of letters were sent after him from Andover House; and, owing to a mistake of Poirier's—his first mistake,—one large batch went astray. It should have reached him at Innsbruck, but Poirier, miscalculating dates, gave the Innsbruck Post Office wrong instructions, and everything was sent forward to the Engadine while my Lord was yet residing in their town. Poirier was chid, and large sums were spent in telegraphic messages, before his lordship's correspondence could be recovered. There was nothing in this, or any other budget, of the least consequence. But Lord Brentwood expected and found interesting newspapers. He read all newspapers greedily—he could not have too many of those long-winded articles that summed up the work and results of the session. He always looked for his own name, and nearly always found it. As an actor, studying the reviews of an acted piece, he searched for criticism of the cast as well as of the plot. The critics were very kind and indulgent to this actor—they declared that what in other hands might have been a small and unimportant part was raised to the highest plane by the talent and stage-presence of a quite magnetic performer. Praise nearly always—no blame, and omission of reference extremely rare!

At last there came a newspaper with real news in it. There was, said the newspaper, a rumor in usually well-informed circles that Mr. Musgrave—Secretary of State, and one of the strongest men in the Commons—would almost immediately take a peerage and retire from office. The retirement would, said the newspaper, most certainly be announced before Parliament met, and readers were begged to note the promptness with which this little secret of the Government had been discovered.

Seymour had heard nothing of it, till now. Was there foundation for the statement? If true, it meant, of course, a vacant chair at the Cabinet table. Sitting at breakfast after he had read the newspaper, he became so silent and preoccupied that Gladys with some anxiety asked him what he was thinking about.

"I am wondering of there is any truth in this. They say

that Mr. Musgrave is retiring—at once; that his health has broken down. They're very positive—they seem cock-sure they have got into the secret—before anybody else."

He was silent and thoughtful, thinking of Mr. Musgrave and the empty place in the Cabinet, all that day.

When they had exhausted the charms of Tyrol, Mr. Poirier hired a motor-car for them and sent them up to the Engadine by the old coach road—over shaking wooden bridges, through queer little towns that all seemed to have the same name and to spell it as they fancied at the moment—Schuls, Sus, Zuz, and so on,—by the side of the hurrying River Inn, past the golf-players of Samaden, past the village where the pastrycooks are born, past the valley that leads to Pontresina and its red-nosed, axe-bearing, cockney climbers, up the hill where the tobogganists break their necks as a winter sport, and into the loud-voiced, polyglot, factitious gaiety of St. Moritz.

They did not repose themselves and their hireling motor until they reached Maloja; and next morning they were on the roll again, down the long hill into smiling fertile Italy. Lord Brentwood hated the Engadine, its windy pine-glades, its mud-colored glaciers, its bare hill-sides; its horizonless prospects; he was eager to push through it, and be done with it. The second week of September was beginning, and their learned courier told them they might now safely face the sultry noontide airs and the warm breathless nights of Como.

It was a burning warm afternoon as the steamboat plodded slowly over the flashing surface of the lake. At a little distance, the shore showed itself through a trembling veil of yellow sunlight; far ahead, it was hidden by white haze; and, above the obscuring girdle, the vine-clad hills rose and seemed to float in the sunlight. The boat crossed and recrossed from shore to shore, or crept close to the land, and the beautiful changing scene unfolded itself—to the rapture and entrancement of Gladys. Everything delighted her—little stone-walled ports with the peasants' boats riding at anchor, little gardens as bright as gathered nosegays, balustrades and steps of stately villas, belfry towers of gray churches, white shrines sparkling

high over terraced vines,—the light, the color of Italy, seen by her to-day for the first time.

Mr. Poirier had secured for them the very best rooms at the very best hotel on the whole lake of Como; and, as they approached their destination, Seymour roused himself from a drowsy reverie and looked about him. On the pier at a village near Cadenabbia, people were waiting to come on board, and among them people that he knew. These were a well-known Radical M.P., a famous K.C.—law officer under the Conservatives,—a popular and fashionable portrait-painter; and he felt glad to see them.

Then, as the steamboat went on and they drew near their landing stage, he saw more people. In rowing boats, set dancing by the wash from the steamer's paddles, there were three prominent politicians—the member for North-West Paddington, Lord Leominster, and Mr. Wadsworth—the President of the Board of Internal Administration. Outside the pretty hotel, when they landed, there were still more familiar faces: of another famous lawyer, a staunch Liberal, of ladies and of men known to the world. He had unexpectedly fallen amid friends; he stopped outside the hotel, talking gaily and contentedly, while the courier and the manager ushered his wife to the first floor; he felt cheered by the friendly laughing chatter. These were the first people to whom he had talked since he left London: after the long, quiet, restful weeks, he was really pleased to see people and be talking to them again.

They finished their holiday at the comfortable and well-conducted hotel by the placid waters of Como. Why hurry away? They had pleasant society now in all their excursions. And somebody said they would be tormented by mosquitos if they went to Venice. Gladys gave up the idea of that culminating treat on which she had counted. Seymour should not be pestered with Venice and its mosquitos. She would not be so selfish as to move him, when obviously he wished to sit still.

After dinner he used to sit, as if glued to his cane chair,

among the other chairs outside the hall of the hotel. He and the gathered politicians had endless discussions of the affairs of their nation. It was extremely pleasant to enjoy so easy and informal a conference with one's holiday-making enemies, and the Conservative Paddingtonian and the Unionist lawyer were amusingly frank and yet flatteringly kind opponents. They thought the Government had done uncommonly well this year, and they approved of the principle of most of the measures that had been carried. These gentlemen of the other side said they did not care how long they remained in opposition—the longer the better. "We are prepared to give you as much rope as you like to use, and we hope you won't hang yourselves in a hurry." They made nothing of recent manifestations of a swinging pendulum—they attached no importance to defeats at by-elections. No, whatever the newspapers said, whatever they themselves might be constrained to say when Parliament met, their candid, holiday, after-dinner opinion was that the Government were going stronger than ever—so strong that they should certainly last out their Lease, and possibly obtain a renewal thereof.

By the way, there was a by-election on now—South-East Sussex. Is your fellow any good? Our fellow, we are told, is a perfect ass—losing votes by the hundred every time he opens his mouth. But it has always been reckoned a safe seat —our last majority, two thousand. Do you think our silly ass can squander that, and let your fellow in?

Lord Brentwood gave them a brief descriptive sketch of the Liberal candidate. Sir Gregory Stuart was a strong personality—self-made man, without cultivation or polish, but not a bad sort,—genial breezy kind of fellow, who did not impress one as particularly shrewd or hard-headed. But unquestionably a man possessed of natural power.—It was said that he always succeeded in anything he attempted. Lord Brentwood knew Stuart fairly well, and, on the whole, rather liked him.

Sometimes the Opposition played bridge with their ladies and the politicians in the cane chairs were all of one color. Then the talk was purely Party, and of course of a far more confidential character. They talked of a scheme for starting

a new Party newspaper, and Seymour applauded the notion and promised to contribute to the funds subscribed for this purpose. And they talked—very often—of impending Cabinet changes.

They all thought it was true—Mr. Musgrave had decided to go. It was a settled thing. Some of them spoke of Lord Brentwood's promotion. Of course he would get his turn now. Who could doubt that?

Seymour thought that one of these men knew what the changes were to be. Another man said nobody knew—except, perhaps, the great wire-pulling Sir William.

Sir William was not far off: at Lucerne, with only the Alps between them and him. He held all secrets. If the Premier had made up his mind—then Sir William *knew*. It made one want to dash through the St. Gotthard, and snatch the secret from the wire-puller-in-chief.

These talks excited Seymour. He felt that he had derived benefit from a thorough rest, and that now, animated to further efforts, he was ready for work again. He felt glad that there was to be an autumn session—glad that business would soon call him home.

When, after another week or so, they were safely conducted by Poirier on their return journey, he was glad to see the cliffs of Dover looming high in the twilight. He was glad to see the lamplight on the Thames, as the boat train drew slowly into Charing Cross. "Look, Gladys,—here we are;" and she understood that the holiday was over, that he was very glad indeed to be back in London.

And that was the end of their companionship.

XXVIII

THROUGHOUT October he was alternately excited and depressed by thoughts of his position in the Party, and his probable advance to a higher status. It would come to him within the stipulated time. They promised Cabinet rank in

three years, and possibly sooner. Well, the promise would be fulfilled before two years and a half had passed. But, so far, he had no hint as to what office they might give him. There would be, as always when a chance occurs, some reshuffling—a small game of General-Post among place-holders,—if only to perplex the public. The man who had done so well at the War Office would be sent to Ireland; the man who had managed the Colonies with such tact and discretion would be asked to look after our county councils, work-houses, rural districts; the man who knew all about education would be begged to learn something about, and henceforth take care of agriculture; and so on. What would they give to Seymour Brentwood? . . . India? He would like to have sole charge of our Eastern Empire.

"It is no longer a secret," said parliamentary correspondents, "that Mr. Musgrave regretfully admits he cannot stand the work of the Commons and the burdensome responsibilities of a great department. He will, however, carry on through this short session, and then publicly acknowledge that he needs repose. . . . The Earl of Brentwood is freely mentioned in connection with the forthcoming change; and, by the gossip of the lobbies, it would seem to be regarded as certain that this popular peer will succeed the out-going minister."

But still Seymour was waiting for direct overtures. They were due now—over-due,—and the delay worried him. More especially he felt bothered by this silence and slowness, because the newspapers were making so free with his name. All of them were "tipping" him now, as a certainty for this or for that: if not India, then Home Affairs; or if not, then Presidency of Council. Scarcely a day passed that he did not fall into the clutch of our representatives—and it was no easy matter to evade the betrayal of one's thoughts, to answer blandly, formally, and correctly.

"Seen by our representative at a late hour last night, Lord Brentwood refused to give information which would be premature.

"In reply to a definite question, Lord Brentwood smiled enigmatically.

"'May we ask if you have observed the widely published statement that you have already been offered the Indian Secretaryship?'

"Lord Brentwood shook his head and smiled good-humoredly, but declined to enter into conversation.

"'May we take it from you that such statements are unauthorized?'

"'Oh, yes,' said Lord Brentwood, with a laugh and a valedictory wave of the hand. 'You may safely do that.'"

On several occasions he had talks with subordinate wire-pullers, but never a talk with Sir William. It was odd, but in these weeks, although he often saw Sir William, he never chanced to see him alone. Sir William moving in a bodyguard of understrappers, Sir William linking arms and whispering with chieftains of rank and file, Sir William making long strides as he chased his private secretary through a lobby—but, as it curiously happened, never Sir William by himself, available for quiet confidential chat! Once or twice Lord Brentwood entertained the thought that busy Sir William was fighting shy of him.

They had broken their bargain!

At last the slight reshuffling was completed; Mr. Musgrave's retirement was announced, his peerage gazetted; the new appointments were all of them made. Mr. Harvey took our Eastern Empire, and the vacant chair at the Cabinet table; Mr. Dugdale picked up Mr. Wordsworth's interrupted labors at the Board of Internal Administration; Lord A moved into this gentleman's place, Mr. C in to Lord A's;—and the Earl of Brentwood remained exactly where he had been hitherto. They had passed him over without explanation or apology. He was disgusted. They had treated him dishonestly, shabbily; and his disgust increased as he became conscious of a sudden extra-graciousness on the part of leaders and their confidants. It was as if they felt that they must appease him by smiles and compliments.

He suffered the greatest annoyance from the newspapers. They all expressed surprise, and some commiserated with him

on what must have surely been a disappointment. Several press-critics used the phrase with which he had irritated himself in brooding thought—"contrary to general anticipation Lord Brentwood has been passed over." It was bad enough to think the words: it was far worse to read them. He fancied that he could detect a rapid change of tone in all these journals, whether Liberal or Unionist. Writers showed less respect to him. It was as if they were angry with him for not verifying their prophecies, and as if they were ashamed of themselves for having over-estimated his height and size. They were letting him down, as fast as they could, to the lower dimensions assigned to him by his Party.

What should he do? How should he deal with those in power—show that he felt aggrieved, or affect not to notice? The thing was humiliating—but perhaps it would be a deeper humiliation to exhibit discontent. He could not bring himself to say: "You have broken your bargain. I will therefore shut up Andover House. And you shall have no more evening-parties."

He did not say it. He wrapped himself in silent dignity; and when his leaders with too gracious mien nodded and smiled at him, he returned the nods, but let the smiles fade out for want of responsive warmth.

Presently the busy over-driven Sir William, now again available for genial friendly duologues, sought speech with the silent Under-Secretary. The great man came beaming, with open hand, cloudless brow,—choke full of love and kindness.

He began profusely to butter Seymour; hoped he was well; asked for his views on the late appointments. More particularly Sir William wishes to know if Mr. Musgrave, the newly created peer, will do in the Lords. Will that House listen to him? It is a singular thing that sometimes the strongest man sent up from the Commons fails to get the ear of "your House."

"Theoretically, of course, Musgrave ought to be invaluable in the Lords—a tower of strength. That's why we all welcomed the chance of putting him there. But *will* he do? That's the question. I wish you'd tell me frankly what you

think. There's no one better qualified to give an opinion: because—and I don't want to flatter—no one ever caught the ear of your House and held it as you have done."

"Yet those in authority," said Lord Brentwood very coldly, "appear to consider me a failure."

"A *failure!* We all think your success without parallel. I don't suppose a man ever made such a mark in so short a time—certainly not Gladstone, Disraeli, Lord Salisbury, or—ah—any of them. You have achieved an extraordinary position."

Lord Brentwood frigidly demurred.

"Do you read the newspapers?" said Sir William, laughing gaily. "Call me a flatterer, but you can't call the great British public all flatterers. Do you happen to be aware that the press—and that means the public—expected you to succeed Musgrave as Secretary of State, now, this minute?"

Lord Brentwood said, with much dignity, that he expected it himself.

Then Sir William acted surprise—almost consternation.

"My dear Lord Brentwood, I can honestly affirm that you were never once thought of—that your name was never mentioned,—the possibility never for a moment examined. But you—you were prepared to accept——"

"Yes—certainly."

Sir William was acting a complete upset—thoughts in confusion. "And why not?" he murmured, as if soliloquizing "Upon my word—a splendid appointment. On my honor—the most popular thing he could have done—if possible.—Never thought of—even had it been possible! . . .

"But tell me.—Did you make any intimation—not to *me,* anyhow—but did you give the slightest hint to *anybody?* . . . No? But why not? When did you last see him?"

Lord Brentwood said that he had not "for ages" seen the illustrious chieftain of the Party—that is, seen him otherwise than the humblest citizen might see him, at a respectful distance.

Sir William turned up his eyes; pished and pshawed. "Tcha! *There's* our weakness.—Too much aloof! Not seen often enough.—Out of touch! *I* don't have access to him as

much as I ought—and others who *ought* to, even less. A weakness, I admit. . . . But now, this is far too important to allow of beating about the bush:—Do you authorize me to convey it—now at once—that you yourself had thought of it—*did* expect it?"

Lord Brentwood refused to give authority for any conveyance of his private thoughts and reflections.

"No? Do you authorize me now to make your mind known as to the future? Is that the office which your inclination—or, ah, your ambition—designates as acceptable,—and that office only?"

No, Lord Brentwood's dignity would not permit him to send any message. He spoke, with an air of lofty self-reliance, of trusting time to prove if he had been wrong in judging his own competence.

"But why," said Sir William plaintively, "why did not you give me your thoughts two months ago? Why not have told me? You left me absolutely in the dark, didn't you? Why? Good gracious, what am I for, except to be told exactly what we are all thinking? If not—what else am I here for?"

Seymour of course knew all that could be said of Sir William. He was an essential part—main pivot, regulating lever, or compensating balance—of the political machine. If his functional activity failed, the wheels of State would promptly cease to go round. But Seymour may not clearly have understood that he was functionally active now. Perhaps this morning when he got up, he said to himself: "My day's task shall be Brentwood. B. must be polished off before I attend to anything else." He stuck to his task: if it took to-day, to-morrow, a week, he must do it.

He told Seymour, after a reflective pause, that, however pleasing another appointment might have been to the public, it would really have been impossible to ignore the claims of the new Cabinet minister. Eighteen years' service, and his specialized knowledge, his extended eastern travels, his books on India,—one could not ignore these matters. No, one could not have passed *him* over. Really he had earned his reward.

Then Lord Brentwood spoke plainly and abruptly of the

unwritten compact—the explicit promise of Cabinet Rank. He almost expected Sir William to act surprise again, or to pretend that he had forgotten. But Sir William remembered all right—a bargain was a bargain. "Three years though—not *two* years!" And then once more he buttered heavily. Lord Brentwood need not fear—he, also, had *earned* the fullest reward. He had already, on his own merits, made such a reputation that he could not be omitted. "Say we go out tomorrow. Very well, you will be one of our strongest men while we are in opposition—and when we come back again, it will be literally impossible to form a ministry without your name in it. I think," concluded Sir William enthusiastically, "that a man who has achieved *that* in two years can afford to wait and laugh at delays."

For the moment Seymour was softened and soothed—but not for long. The effect of Sir William's butter wore off; the newspapers turned him hard, and doubtful of all wire-pullers. The newspapers did not any longer believe in him, because they saw that he was not believed in by others. Sir William and his superiors used him as though he had been a child—to be paid for his assistance with compliments and sugar plums. His coldness was patent and undisguised when the Cabinet-maker himself took an occasion to smile at him.

He was quite out of conceit with his political career, and disdainful of the minor official duties which till now had seemed so important. He thought of the men who had in the past held his office, and of what had come to them. He looked up their records in such useful volumes as *Who's Who, Everybody who is Anybody,* etc. They were not Anybodies; they were, practically, Nobodies. The Duke of Newport, who had been at Christ Church with him; Lord Moleridge, who had left the Household Cavalry because of his defective eye-sight; Lord Wimpleby, and so on—why, it was the sort of office they gave to any well-born young fool who cared to accept it! Newport had been Under-Secretary at the age of twenty-four. Only one of them—Mr. Bulmer—had come to anything; and they dabbed him into the Cabinet at the very first opportunity.

They believed in Mr. Bulmer, and pushed him quickly to the front.

For a little while the present Under-Secretary was disillusioned as well as disgusted. He thought with bitterness of the Party-rulers: in his case, they were trying to get everything for nothing. His chilling and distant manner rendered Sir William very uneasy.

One cannot but suppose that this watchful lieutenant made urgent representations to his commander. Something must be done now at once for our Under-Sec.

The Earl of Brentwood was immediately sworn of His Majesty's Most Honorable Privy Council. At least he might wear the same sort of coat as Mr. Harvey's. If gold lace will satisfy him, do not let us grudge it. And ribbons? Can anything be done by giving him a sash? The Earl of Brentwood was decorated with the Grand Cross of the order of St. Michael and St. George, in recognition of his services as deputy-chairman of the Commission that had recently inquired into the Advisability of Autonomous Taxation for Crown Dependencies.

The newspapers, commenting on these honors, changed their tone again. No extinguishing cap has been placed over Lord Brentwood: his fame is burning brighter than ever! Newspapers were once more respectful. Lord Brentwood is in the highest favor with the Party. He returns smiles for smiles. No coldness to worry poor Sir William—Lord and Lady Brentwood had dined at No. 10 Downing Street.

In fact, Seymour felt appeased. Again, for a little while, he was without doubts of others and of himself. Contentedly he went on with his work. As Sir William eulogistically had said—he could afford to wait.

XXIX

ONE afternoon, when the Lords were not sitting, Seymour went to drink tea with his step-sister at her flat in Hill Street. Lady Emily Charlton had made a special request that

he would sacrifice some of his valuable time for her benefit: she wanted to talk to him about family matters.

The first matter concerning which Lady Emily needed the advice of the head of the family was the education and advancement of their nephew Jack. Mr. John Charlton had not been doing well—just lately—at school: he had in fact shown his father's disinclination to submit to established authority. Poor dear Lady Collingbourne thought she had better remove him from Eton altogether, and arrange for private tuition. Lady Collingbourne wished him to be a soldier; but now Jack had announced that he would like to go back to engineering.

"You know, Colley originally intended him to be an engineer—and Jack declares that he will enter the motor-car industry. That seems to me no profession at all. . . . Cannot you dissuade him, Seymour? He is with his mother at Wimbledon. Could you possibly go down one day soon, and talk things over with them? The boy would naturally be impressed by anything *you* said. Perhaps a few words from you would alter his whole future life."

Seymour said that he would endeavor to supply the few words. Time passed so rapidly—but he felt his responsibilities strongly; he had always intended to keep a guardian's attentive eye on Collingbourne's children.

"And is that all you wanted to ask me, Emily?"

The second thing Lady Emily wished to speak of occasioned her some embarrassment and hesitation.

"Seymour," she said timidly, "will you forgive me for asking a home question? . . . Is there any difference or estrangement between you and Gladys?"

The question surprised him greatly.

"No," he said. "Gladys and I were never better friends than we are now."

"I am so pleased to hear that—to be sure that there is no drifting apart. That *would* be such a pity. Forgive your troublesome old sister, Seymour. I felt I must speak—even if you were offended. Because I do think that the drifting apart one sometimes sees nowadays is so dreadful."

Gaining courage as she proceeded, Lady Emily raised her

meek blue eyes from the tea tray and fixed them on her brother's thoughtful face. "You know how I love you—and admire you, Seymour, for the noble way in which you took up all your burdens on Colley's death. I know how conscientious you are, and how truly you do feel—the sense of responsibility. And, of course, most of all, you must feel your responsibility—for Gladys." And Lady Emily launched forth into praise of her young sister-in-law. "I meant to be fond of her—whatever she was like—because she was your wife. But I was fond of her at once for her own sake—because she was so candid and innocent, so *unspoilt;* and, perhaps more than anything, because she was so very fond of you."

Of all his innumerable relatives, Lady Emily was the only one who had shown the slightest affection or regard for his wife; and, as he said now, he had been very grateful for the unique kindness.

"But, Emily, why should you imagine——"

Then this queer old spinster gave her thoughts upon the marriage state, and expressed her horror of modern loosenings of the bond. "It ought to be so close a communion, dear Seymour, such a sacred tie—and yet people seem to treat it as though it were nothing at all. You know what I mean—Without scandal, and I hope without real guilt, couples seem to get disconnected—each going an independent course—until they are really only husband and wife in name. You know what one hears—what they say of Lord and Lady Wellingborough," and she cited other persons of the best social positions and the highest rank. "They are good friends—but nothing more. That does seem to me so dreadful," said Lady Emily flushing, and blinking her eyes. "If people have any religion left, how can they forget their vows before God? If it was just to be *friends*—living in the same house and perhaps not seeing each other day after day—only meeting at the evening meal when other people are present—well, then I say they oughtn't to have *married,* and it was impious and wicked and blasphemous to do it."

"Are not marriages of convenience sometimes justified, as well as love-matches? Men are forced to marry—far various

reasons. Doctors find a wife helps them professionally——"

"I was only thinking of people in our own walk of life, Seymour."

"Like Lord Wellingborough! Well, people marry sometimes—in the hope of having children."

"Then all the more reason not to drift apart," said Lady Emily earnestly; and, with an old maid's naive directness of logic, she added: "How can they expect a family if they never see each other?"

"Wellingborough has a large family—five or six children."

"And that is more dreadful," said Lady Emily. "The children ought to have held them together. . . . That's all I mean, Seymour. I hope that—after our sad disappointment—you and dear Gladys will be blessed again and again. That is the duty of dear Gladys—to give you a son and heir,—to raise you up a family. Be old-fashioned in that, and pray for children—don't be modern, and jeopardize your future happiness by drifting apart. . . . I know you'll forgive me for talking like this. I know you agree with me in your heart."

"Yes, but I wonder what has set you thinking about it."

"Only because"—and Lady Emily, losing her unusual fluency, hesitated and looked down at her tea-cup again.—"Because one sometimes meets dear Gladys without you—and one meets you so often without her. I fancied—somehow—that she relied on other people for company—more than she used to."

Seymour was perplexed and troubled by his sister's home questions and odd little homilies. What Lady Emily had spoken of, as something that at all costs should be prevented, was in fact happening. He and his wife were drifting apart. They were good friends, as he hastened to say. There were no squabbles now—no criticisms, no reproaches; and yet the separation of husband and wife was being slowly, insidiously constituted. He had not admitted it to himself; but Lady Emily, blundering somehow at the truth, forced him to recognize it.

He could trace it back to their return to London. The

pressure of business began then; the holiday bond of idleness snapped in a moment; the anxieties, hopes, and irritations of the well-filled days once more absorbed him. Worried now by his sister's curious interrogation, he thought of many of the things that Gladys had said to him at Dykefield. Could he be accused of neglecting her because he went on with the business of his life?

Their holiday had been, for him as well as for her, a second honeymoon; and while it lasted—till they reached Italy,—he recovered and enjoyed something of the old happy companionship, the frank and open communion of marriage. Then, with thoughts of the world, natural and really praiseworthy ambitions, reawakened interest in public affairs, there had come to him what seemed at once weariness and restlessness. He could not give his wife all his thoughts—and yet perhaps nothing less would really satisfy her.

It almost seemed as if the unceasing companionship was the fundamental basis of the perfect marriage state as dreamed of by Lady Emily, and perhaps also by Gladys. Without it, the essential union went to pieces. But how can a man have a companion—wife or anyone else—with him through every hour of the day?

While he remembered the warning voice of his queer old sister, he was troubled in mind, doubtful and uncertain as to duties and plans.

He felt once or twice an intuitive fear of the future. It was as if suddenly he had reached another turning point of life, as if he was confronted with the necessity of definitely making a choice—wife or the world. Lady Emily and his own troubled thought seemed to tell him that he must choose now. Wife or the world—he might not choose both. One or other he must let slip away from him.

He thought of it often—but he did nothing; and soon the memory of his sister's words faded or ceased to worry him. Gladys made no complaint. Indeed, of what could she have complained—after their reconciliation? He was keeping his promise: letting her do whatever she liked. And she was undoubtedly keeping her promise. She had gained aplomb;

she was calm and stately and self-possessed in public places—giving herself airs, it was said by some people; rigidly conforming to all conventions; perhaps too carefully modelling herself on the established pattern of English great lady. And if, in thus striving after a stereotyped form of excellence, she lost something of her natural charm, he did not miss it. He saw that she was trying to please him, and he was pleased.

XXX

GLADYS, although she had a free hand and so much time to dispose of this autumn, was but rarely cheered by the society of her brother or her father. Schiller had gone to Dinard in August, and was still abroad. Mr. Copland was in London, but entirely occupied with his grand shop, his large contracts, and his faithful secretary.

"I don't know how I could get through my work without her," he told his daughter. "She is my right hand—that is the only word for her."

He had called upon Lady Brentwood, to apologize for long absence, to complain again of Schiller's bad behavior, and to ask a favor. Might he have permission to bring Miss Vincent to see Andover House and the pictures? "I have told her so much about it—and I should like her to see my treatment of the boudoir. We are going to do something similar at the Darmstadt Hotel—that is to say, if our scheme goes through. But this, my dear, is strictly *entre nous*. I should not have mentioned it—Not a word of that to anyone. But it is a fact that I now have on hand something which will probably open out into a contract of unprecedented magnitude . . . "

"Well, may I bring her one afternoon when you are out—if it can be arranged? And perhaps you would let us have a cup of tea."

Permission was of course granted to view the antique treasures and modern decorations of Andover House, but its mistress did not stay at home to receive the visitors. Mr. Copland's

talented and good-looking assistant was as gorgeously and fashionably attired as if she had come to pay a ceremonious visit. Perhaps Papa had told Miss Vincent that he was bringing her to drink tea with the Countess of Brentwood. He certainly asked for her ladyship, and expressed surprise when the servant said she was out. "Dear me, how unfortunate. No doubt she has been called away. . . . But we are expected?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Mr. Osborn, the butler.

The splendid empty apartments were duly inspected by Miss Vincent; and Mr. Copland doubtless described to her their magnificent appearance when blazing with light and filled with noble guests at one of his daughter's receptions. Perhaps he even went so far as to promise Miss Vincent that, if she continued to be good and to do her type-writing neatly, a card of invitation should be procured for her when next season's entertainments began.

Tea was served for the visitors in the small dining room, and Miss Vincent, removing her long suede gloves, and displaying some very pretty gipsy rings, did ample justice to the semi-transparent bread and butter, the creamy cakes and sweet sandwiches, the hot-house fruit, etc., provided for the occasion.

"Thank you, Osborn, my good fellow," said Mr. Copland, with an odd mixture of friendliness and grandeur. "You have tempted us with your delicacies;" and he presently slipped a sovereign into Osborn's adroit palm, in exchange for the respectfully tendered hat and umbrella.

He came again, after a week or so, to tell Gladys how thoroughly Miss Vincent enjoyed her afternoon, and to ask another favor. This time, however, he did not beg for an invitation, but he gave one. The favor would lie in the acceptance of his offered kindness. He begged his daughter to spend the next week-end—Friday to Monday—as his guest at the seaside. He had been prevented from taking any real holiday this year, but now he could get a few days; there was still some warmth and sunshine on the south coast; and he wanted to make up a pleasant little party at the Beach-End Hotel. Schiller and one or two friends had already accepted.

"Do come, my dear. It will gratify and please me beyond words——"

Gladys shyly inquired if Miss Vincent was to be of the party.

"No, no," said Mr. Copland. "No, this is purely pleasure—not business. I shan't require a secretary. I shall indulge myself with absolute relaxation . . . And, my love," he added, significantly, "in any event, I should not have included her in a party to which you were coming. I am not without discretion."

Gladys thought sadly that Papa, if not without discretion, really seemed quite without shame, so far as Miss Vincent was concerned.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tilney will be with us—wealthy and in a sense eminent people. No one will be there of whom you would not approve. And—to be quite frank—beyond giving me the pleasure of your company—I want your influence to aid me with that unlucky boy—Schiller."

And then Papa alarmed her by his account of her brother's injudicious conduct. Schiller, according to Papa, had fallen among the most dangerous holiday-makers, male and female, at Dinard. He had been gambling, drinking, running through much money.

"He cannot pretend that I am ungenerous," said Mr. Copland. "But it is impossible to satisfy his demands. I am prosperous—I rejoice to declare it—and I wished him to have his share—a fair share. But there *are* limits."

After staying at Dinard long after all reputable summer tourists had departed, Mr. Schiller moved on to Paris—still surrounded by evil comrades. To this gay and too expensive city old Copland had sent an ultimatum. He declined to supply further funds for dissipation and riotous living, and he commanded his son to acknowledge the error of his ways and return without an hour's delay to propriety, the shop, and Papa. Schiller totally disregarded the ultimatum—and spent much more money.

"He drew on me for a very considerable sum—forced my hand, like holding a pistol to one's head—a bill, you understand—stand and deliver."

Gladys did not understand, but she was inexpressibly shocked by Schiller's unfilial conduct.

"I paid," said Mr. Copland dolefully. "I must pay, or bring dishonor on him. But I bitterly resented his behavior —an enormity,—and I wrote, my dear, saying I cast him off, and heartily wished he was back in Canada. You cannot blame me! . . . However, three nights ago, the boy walked into my office; and, well, we made it up. He was cleaned out—literally denuded of everything but what he stood up in. . . . I confess I shed tears at sight of him—and, to make a long story short, he repents of his folly, and promises amendment. I never do things by halves, and I mean to forget all about it. We start again as before—and if now, while he is feeling some remorse, you exert your influence and stimulate his good intentions, we may perhaps hope for permanent improvement."

Lord Brentwood readily consented to his wife's absence. Beach-End—oh yes, certainly. "It is *our* hotel," he said with a smile. "I have just bought shares in it. You must take notice of everything—the cooking, the servants, the management—and the number of people. Send me a list of the people staying there. Ask the manager, or Mr. Copland, to give it to you. . . . I hope you'll have fine weather.—I would go with you, if I could get away."

Gladys obediently sent her list; and among Beach-End guests Seymour saw the name of Harold Ingram. It was absurd, but he disliked the name: he had not yet forgotten his annoyance at the discovery of Mr. Ingram publicly "hanging-on" in Hyde Park.

Gladys herself had been pleased to find this gentleman of the company assembled by Papa. He would be the best of allies in a gentle upbraiding of Schiller; if he had been able to spend the summer with Schiller, dangers and disasters would have been avoided. She had a very high opinion of Schiller's interesting, elegant, and true-hearted friend.

She walked on Sunday with him, and Schiller, nearly as far as Bexhill. And she walked with him after dinner—on the terrace round which Sir Gregory and Miss Danvers had once

prowled, vainly seeking tea and cakes. It was a lovely October night—the hunter's moon riding in a cloudless sky, the coast line showing clear and sharp, moonlight on the quiet sea, and the lamps of the pretty little town and port twinkling warmly in the nearest bay. Mr. Ingram returned to the hotel, brought her a cloak; and they sat together on the terrace, and he told her the story of his life. It started with Schiller, and went on with Harold. A sad pitiful story it seemed to Gladys —tremendous and perhaps too early love rashly bestowed; crushing disappointment, most cruel betrayal; and, to sum up, Ingram's life ruined and wasted.

She did not invite this confession, felt surprised, and endeavored to stop it when begun; but she sympathized cordially with her brother's pal. Things that he said about life and love were things she had thought always—and a long time ago had talked of to her husband. She found herself giving Mr. Ingram little scraps of encouragement and strengthening advice that she had mentally prepared for Schiller. He was to be true to himself, and so forth.

The story saddened her grievously. Told with the utmost delicacy, it showed her what bad women there are in the world, and what incalculable destruction is sometimes wrought by them.

Left alone in London, Seymour dined with Sir Gregory Stuart. The Party held Stuart in the most flattering esteem; Sir William, representing the Party, wrung his hand, put an arm around his neck, patted his back and almost kissed him. Gallant, cheery Stuart had maintained his reputation for achievement in whatever he attempted. He had given the political pendulum a rousing jerk in the right direction; he had "stopped the rot" of by-elections, scored a triumphant victory in South-East Sussex, and won a seat for the Government. He was M.P.—and, having subjected himself to considerable self-restraint while electioneering, he now broke out.

His dinner—at the Darmstadt Hotel—was a strange celebration of his success. Large space—comprising rooms usually public—was put at the private service of Sir Gregory;

Mr. Marlow, taking hats and coats in an ante-chamber, supervised for Sir Gregory, but was not active; M. Nicolas urged the chef to supreme efforts; every servant in the hotel was at Sir Gregory's disposal. It was whispered that Sir Gregory might reasonably make himself at home at the Darmstadt, because in sober truth the Darmstadt belonged to him.

He had not bidden his business friends to rejoice and feast with him. No dull money-grubbers were present. The men were all very clever—Mr. Austin Judford the dramatist, Mr. Carlo White the librettist, Mr. Gavan Daw the caricaturist, with other bright spirits from the Beefsteak and Garrick Clubs. The ladies were all very attractive—but not the sort of ladies who are received at Court or met with in general society.

"We are Bohemian to-night," said Sir Gregory jovially, yet apologetically, to Lord Brentwood; and then he laughed. "You see, just lately I have had to be so dashed careful—so infernally proper. . . . Let me introduce you to Mam'zelle Zenaire."

Mademoiselle Zenaire of the Folies Bergeres had come over to astonish and captivate London with the new sort of dancing that now has so strong a vogue—Daughter of Pharaoh, bathing or dancing in the bull-rushes—what not fresh and entertaining. Mademoiselle was glad to meet my Lord Brentwood; all the pretty ladies wished for the honor of introduction; bright eyes were concentrated upon him, with a languishing, admiring stare. The capacious room seemed a splendid cave full of sirens. There was no Miss Danvers to absorb Sir Gregory, but a tow-haired music-hall *ingénue* obtained marked attention from the host.

It was the first time since his marriage that Seymour had been among the sirens, and he more or less enjoyed himself. The sirens made so much of him. If he had been kindly treated as Seymour Charlton, what now could be too much kindness for Lord Brentwood? He was like a royal prince—the men respectfully drew away when he talked to a lady.—He was like a sultan; and the men were as flattering as the ladies. It seemed as if these clever gentlemen would rather talk to him than to the sirens.

Sir Gregory observed his fascination over the ladies, and frankly envied him. The politeness of the talented males did not make Sir Gregory in the least envious. "They're all of them toadies—these artistic writing fellows," he thought contemptuously. "They'd sooner walk arm-in-arm with a lord any day than get a good dinner from a commoner."

Before the evening was over, Seymour had made up a dinner-party for to-morrow. On the spur of the moment he committed himself to his second celebration of Sir Gregory's success. Mademoiselle Zenaire was a stranger in the land, and she dreaded the triste English Sabbath; she archly implored Lord Brentwood to let her see him again.—He issued his invitations there and then. Mademoiselle and five or six of the prettiest ladies, with Sir Gregory of course, and some of the wits, would gratify him with their company. But where? At Andover House. They were to come to the side door, round the corner of Carolus Street.

Then he said goodnight, and hurried off, lest he should have to invite anybody else. Going away, he told Marlow to do this private banquet for him "from the outside," "without assistance of the household."

"Yes, my lord," said Mr. Marlow. "Four o'clock will be time enough to give me the number of covers required."

Next morning Lord Brentwood somehow felt ashamed of himself. His Sunday festival appeared ill-devised and beneath his dignity. Yet it was the sort of discreetly quiet hospitality often practised by other great noblemen. He used the telephone to issue further invitations; and was glad to get delighted acceptances from Lord Ormskirk, a married peer of heavy weight, from Lord Swindon, a peer who had long supported theatrical and operatic enterprises, and, best of all, from Lord Rotherham, an honored member of the Government. This put the entertainment on a proper footing—great noblemen patronizing artists, beauties, wits.

He went to lunch at a club where he would be likely to meet young men, and here invited three or four lively bloods. They would serve to lighten the entertainment—into which perhaps he had been putting a too ponderous element.

Marlow did it all, very efficiently, from the outside. One of Marlow's men stood at the street corner. Another of them stood at the wicked-looking little side door in the blank wall.—It did not look so secret and wicked to-night, with electric light pouring out of it, carpet rolled on the pavement, and the stone lobby full of flowers and ferns. Dinner was laid in the middle room for eighteen or twenty people, and the pretty ladies were soon in the highest spirits. Marlow, as well as furnishing the table with good food, good wine, fragrant nosegays, and so forth, had decorated it with amusing little mechanical toys—dolls that wrestled and tumbled in quaint attitudes,—and immense crackers containing delightful whimsicalities. Marlow understood his world, and knew the innocent childish gaiety that can be sometimes produced by quite artificial means.

The talk was loud, the laughter was shrill. Pulled crackers burst with terrific explosion, and spared the wits their trouble in letting off bon-mots. Paper caps of monstrous size and design were adjusted on weighty heads by slender fingers. Sir Gregory was bonneted with a Directoire hat; Lord Rotherham for a few minutes consented to hide his ministerial face behind a clown's mask.

"Oh, you *do* look so silly—oh, if you could see yourself—how silly you look. Oh, take it off or I shall die of laughter." The lady on Seymour's left wished to crown him too, with colored paper; but Mademoiselle Zenaire, on his right, became prettily indignant, snatched the fool's cap from the other lady's hand, deftly wove a garland, and decorated him instead with a coronet of flowers.

Thus adorned, he sat smiling upon his guests in the brilliantly lit, hidden room;—while, far away, Gladys was sitting in the moonlight by the wide sea, listening to the tale of unrequited love and a wasted life.

Later, Mademoiselle Zenaire was kind enough to dance for them—not as the daughter of Pharaoh, but encumbered with her full costume. She bounded and pirouetted from Lord Brentwood's working cabinet into the dining room and back again, to the rapture of the bloodish young men and the

theatrical peer, who vowed that London would be as completely enslaved by her airy grace and seductive charm as had been Paris. She concluded her performance by a beautiful sinking curtsey to the dinner-giver—indeed, would not rise from this obeisance until Lord Brentwood gave her his hand, and with princely condescension raised her.

Later still, in the midst of the well-sustained merriment and chatter, he had a few minutes interesting talk with the member for South-East Sussex. This perhaps was a chance that Sir Gregory had long been pining for. He took his chance promptly. He told Lord Brentwood all about his hotels, his business associates, and his scheme for launching a new Darmstadt. As yet the new Darmstadt company was a projection, but it might be a fact to-morrow if Sir Gregory had his way. At his own personal risk, he had secured a controlling interest in the existing Darmstadt company: he held it firm, in the hollow of his hand. "I have put up nearly all I am worth to achieve this," he said, "but I am prepared to pass it over without one farthing's profit—because I believe, I *know* we can make a big thing of it. . . . I have the whole thing here," and he tapped his forehead—"all cut and dried—if I could only get my people to see it. If they don't, if they *won't* see it, I mean to go straight ahead on my own account."

He sketched his cut-and-dried scheme in a few words. Give the London public real luxury, and they'll pay any money for it.—He would rebuild his Darmstadt, and knock out every hotel in London. But Malcomson and the others hung back, were frightened by his thoroughness. They were disposed to go with him a little way, but not all the way. They wanted to cut down his scheme—no rebuilding for them. Refurnishing perhaps, and a new restaurant! "They may be right, after all," said Sir Gregory; "but I don't think they are. I think I am offering them a gold mine—and they are saying, 'Let it be a small mine, and not too much gold in it.' . . . Am I boring you? Perhaps they are right and I am wrong," and Sir Gregory laughed good-humoredly. "But it is what they have done all along—held me in with a tight rein. 'Stuart is too sanguine—far too sanguine!' You see, they are solid commer-

cial people—unaccustomed to risks of any sort. Old Malcomson is a banker. Tilney is a banker's stockbroker, Adams is a wholesale provision dealer—they have piled up big fortunes by going slow, and they don't mean to go faster just to oblige me."

Seymour, weary of his noisy guests, was pleased to stand in a corner and talk quietly with Sir Gregory. He was impressed by the force and capacity of the man, and also by a simplicity and absence of opiniated self-conceit. Sir Gregory, speaking of business matters, immediately seemed to improve —one lost sight of his commonness.

The young bloods and the theatrical peer could not thank Seymour sufficiently for giving them so happy a Sunday evening. His ministerial colleague was equally enthusiastic; he heartily welcomed this slight lapse from an almost oppressive official dignity.

Yet, when they had all gone, Seymour felt tired and brainsick. He was vaguely disgusted, with everything and everybody, as he let himself out of his private retreat into his silent halls and corridors. No harm had been done certainly; but it seemed to him that he had polluted his palace and set it to a base use. No degradation to his wife's home—because these people had never entered it. They had been shut off, kept out of the real guest-chambers by locked doors—had been entertained as servants. No possible harm in it—because he was faithful to his wife. He had not yielded—could never yield—to the temptation of sirens.

But he remembered that he had once more been directed by the thought of others, and not by his own thought—that he had weakly followed a line marked out for him, not traced by himself. Marlow had built the rooms for him, and he had used them. Marlow had led him astray. He felt that he had done something vulgar, stupid, and unworthy of himself, in using the rooms merely because Marlow had contrived them.

The night watchman asked him if he might go in and look round after Mr. Marlow and his men. Jarvis knew what class of company was hidden in there.—The servants of course knew all about it.

"Oh, yes," said Lord Brentwood. "Go in and see to the fires—see that everything is safe. They are all gone;" and he stopped and spoke further to Jarvis, asked him the time—like a criminal, coming from some deed of darkness, who purposely speaks to a policeman on his beat, he established evidence that might prove serviceable.

"One-twenty-three a.m., my lord," said Jarvis, looking at his watch.

Well, if the servants knew so much, let them know this too—that the secret cave was empty before half-past one, and that my lord was left alone in his palace, ascending the grand staircase to bed at one-twenty-four a.m. by Greenwich and Jarvis's time.

XXXI

A SOCIAL gathering at which Seymour and Gladys soon might be seen together was a very grand affair—for Bayswater. They dined in state with Mr. and Mrs. Malcomson. Very flattering pressure had been brought to bear upon Lord Brentwood to induce him to honor Bayswater with the presence of himself and his Countess, and strenuous efforts were expended in securing other guests of the highest possible repute. Sir Gregory Stuart rendered valuable aid by introducing the Mexican Minister and Madame de Segura; and, for the rest, there were a general, a baronet, knights and dames, two members of parliament, a county court judge—and not more than three of Malcomson's real friends. Altogether it was the most fashionably brilliant entertainment that had ever been attempted in this rich but gloomy mansion.

Fat Mrs. Malcomson a dozen times at least thanked Lord Brentwood for coming. She told Lady Brentwood that she would not have ventured to ask them, but her husband so much wished it, and Irene encouraged her and said they were always so kind. "And you *have* been kind to Irene—such a true friend. Of course we knew you as a child, didn't we?

And you are one who remembers old times and old friends.—Though I'm sure we never did anything much for you—when perhaps we might have shown attention to your family." Miss Irene checked Mamma's simple tongue, by affectionate greeting of her dear friend Gladys. But she failed to prevent Mamma for apologizing for going down to dinner with the representative of Mexico. Irene would have it that this was the correct arrangement, but it did not seem right to Mrs. Malcomson. The daughter of the house would give her arm to his lordship.

"I hope Lord Brentwood won't be huffed, that's all," Mrs. Malcomson had replied. "But I dare say he'll find you better company than me."

And now, to Irene's ill-concealed annoyance, she apologized. She was unable to pretend that this was just an ordinary sort of Bayswater evening. She felt overwhelmed by the condescension and affability of such illustrious and unusual visitors.

Old Malcomson was undisturbed in manner—heavy and dismal as always. Perhaps, presiding at the banquet, he felt some satisfaction; but certainly, if he had desired to see Lord Brentwood seated at his table, he had a deeper and more solid motive than the gratification of snobbish vanity.

After dinner he showed Lord Brentwood his pictures, solemnly marching round with him and humbly submitting his Tademas, Leightons, and Moores as poor little modern things scarcely worth the notice of the owner of rooms full of Vandykes, Romneys, Gainsboroughs. He neglected the other guests; he made nothing of the Mexican Minister—turned his back on the Corps Diplomatique, to lay himself at the feet of the British aristocrat. He allowed his generals and baronets to find their way upstairs unescorted, or told Stuart to herd them off and leave him at peace to wait upon the great Lord Brentwood.

Gallant Sir Gregory, joining the ladies in the double drawing-room, was like a monstrous ungainly moth blundering about till he reached the dangerous flame that already had scorched and singed him. Irene was the flame, flashing and glowing,

burning with destructive, irresistible brightness. He stood before her, his hands hanging clumsily, his eyes staring: a coarse beast of a man, brutally amorous and stupidly pertinacious.

"How well you are looking, Miss Malcomson. What a lovely dress," and he dropped his voice, and whispered his admiration. "Miss Irene, am I ever to be forgiven for my imprudence?"

"What was that?" asked Irene, with a smile.

"I won't recall it—since you are gracious enough to forget, and to forgive."

Irene smiled. She was gracious to everybody to-night—on her very best behavior.

"Don't," said Sir Gregory, "recollect anything about it—except this, that I am of the same mind always. I never change;" and Irene smiled again.

She smiled radiantly when, after a little while, Papa reappeared with the guest of the evening. She wished to know what Lord Brentwood thought of the pictures. "Did he show you the Perseus? . . . I felt sure you would say that was good."

Lord Brentwood sat with her on the sofa that had appeared not large enough for two just now, when Sir Gregory clumsily hovered in front of it. Sir Gregory suffered an angry discomfort as he observed them sitting side by side. Again he jealously and enviously fancied that he saw the careless exercise of Lord Brentwood's power or fascination over the softer sex. Closely observing, he remembered suddenly his first talk with her at Andover House. She had watched Lord Brentwood in the supper-room, instead of listening to him, her cavalier; she had been curious about the lady who was supping with Lord Brentwood, had interrupted him and bothered him with questions about the fortunate lady who had Lord Brentwood for cavalier.

"Hang it," thought Sir Gregory, "has *she* fallen in love with him too? That would be too dashed riling.—No chance for anybody *then!*"

This thought and his observation of the prolonged *tete-a-tete* made him so wrathfully discontented that he left early—immediately after the departure of his Mexican friends.

"Goodnight, Malcomson. I must be off." And then, to the host following him down stairs: "Well? Did you speak about it?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He seems to take to the idea. We are to go and see him, and put it all before him. Yes," added Malcomson, gloomily, as ever, "I believe he'll do it."

"Bravo," said Stuart. "Goodnight. See you to-morrow."

Malcomson's cryptic communication pleased him exceedingly; it conveyed the best of news; and yet he went home fuming in anger and mortification. Arrived at Knightsbridge, he told Mr. Waller curtly that the evening had been a success; but he declined with testiness to discuss his commercial hopes and doubts. Mr. Waller was staying in the house—summoned to London to assist his principal in the great operation now on hand.

Sir Gregory would not touch upon financial schemes; but before he went to bed, he talked to the trusted Waller about the cause of his annoyance and agitation. He sat in an armchair, fretting and fuming while he drank the whisky-and-soda that Mr. Waller had mixed for him; then he walked about the library, muttering and cursing; then he mixed for himself more and stronger doses. He drank a surprising amount of whisky; he brandished his arms, threw a beautifully bound book into a corner of the room, shook his fist at the coldly unconscious marble nymph by his bureau. And at last he made to the sympathetic Waller a most unedifying confession.

Love, not business, was troubling him. He was desperately and hopelessly in love.

Mr. Waller spoke sympathetically but reprovingly. Surely it was a pity to involve oneself in these harassing and unsatisfactory intrigues. A member of Parliament must be almost as careful as a candidate—the most successful men have come to grief by persistently outraging the conventions.

"And beyond that," said the faithful Waller, "there's yourself to consider.—You can't safely go on upsetting yourself in this manner—for ever. With all the work you are doing, you

want rest and quiet—not this perpetual excitement on top of the work."

"I know that—but I can't rest. I know very well how much I want rest."

Waller looked at him attentively. He had sat down, and was mopping his forehead with a trembling hand. His red cheeks were hot and damp; the perspiration was pouring from his brow; veins stood out in a purple network; and his eyes, slightly blood-shot, glistened with a fishlike, silvery whiteness. Nothing or very little of these unhealthy effects was produced by the heavy doses of whisky. Mr. Waller knew from experience that Sir Gregory might often drink much, but he never got drunk. The distress all came from the inward strain—the mental storm showing physical derangement. Mr. Waller thought now what he had regretfully thought once or twice of late: Sir Gregory was not quite the man he had been.

"You ought to remember," he said gently, "that we are none of us as young as we were."

"Dash it, I know that too. You needn't throw that in my teeth. If I was younger, I might have better luck."

"Well, well," said Mr. Waller. "Tell me who she is—this time."

"There's only one woman in England that I care about—except my wife. Leonora is always first. But this is different—you know what I mean, Waller."

Mr. Waller of course knew the difference between steady domestic affection and a vagrant infatuation. He listened gravely while Sir Gregory continued, in the manner of a love-sick but grossly sensual schoolboy.

"But I do fall a victim to beauty and cleverness combined—it's no use struggling against it. Waller, she bowled me over at first sight. It was like Romeo and Juliet—the very scene—only, confound it, my Juliet wouldn't have anything to do with me. . . . It's a damned silly thing, but I *dream* about her."

"Is the lady an actress?"

"No. Nothing of the sort. She is a lady in society. Waller, I mustn't tell you who she is."

"Is she—er—virtuously unassailable?"

"No, she isn't. No—and that's what drives me wild. . . . Confound her, she laughs at me—draws me on, and then laughs at me. I tell you, she makes me want to wring her neck; and yet I can't keep away from her. I'd spend any money—I'd do *anything* to win her favor . . .

"And I believe I should have won it—by playing a waiting game." Sir Gregory had got up, and was walking round the room and brandishing his arms again. "But now another fellow has come along—the last man on earth I wanted to bump up against in *that* field. He'll kill my chance. Oh, it *is* damned bad luck!"

Sympathetic Mr. Waller scarce knew what to say. The wise thing would be to purge one's mind of all these distressing and exciting thoughts—to forget one's Juliet, or look about for an under-study to play the part. But perhaps Sir Gregory need not despair.

"Remember," he said comfortingly, "you cut out a rival in your previous *affaire de coeur.*"

"Yes, Waller, old boy, so I did. I took Edie Danvers away from young Papworth, didn't I? . . . But don't compare the two," cried Sir Gregory indignantly. "This is a lady in society. Don't mention her and that greedy little slut in the same breath."

A few days after the Malcomson's dinner party, it became known to the surprise of some friends and admirers, that Lord Brentwood was going into business. He had consented to be chairman of the new Darmstadt Hotel Company.

The success of Stuart's allied group of companies—as seemed to be proved by plain facts—had been unbroken from the first modest little flotation of Beach-End. Apparently, there was no limit to the possible increase of business, or to the expansion of capital justified by the confidence of the public. Something like three millions of money had already been put into the capital amount of the group. But as much again would be forthcoming to-morrow. Seaside Hotels Ltd.—the company in which Lord Brentwood took his first block of shares—had

expanded itself to a far-reaching organization: it owned a dozen houses, and all of them thriving. Then it amalgamated itself with another company, owning London houses—all of them flourishing—and the combination was known as the Amalgamated Hotels. The twin affair was always growing, always inviting fresh subscriptions to foster its growth. Now the Darmstadt was to burst into life, nearly as big as all the rest of the enterprise. It was to be "the last word" in hotel elegance, pomp, and luxury. It would take the cream of the London trade, be the favored haunt of fashion and wealth. It would scoop the pool—as sanguine Sir Gregory promised. Who could doubt that it would succeed? Then, later on, when the success was assured, there would probably come a rapid expansion—the re-building, etc;—and then, finally, another amalgamation. It and the existing group would roll together and merge—and then the Stuart companies would be financially one magnificent whole. That was the ultimate scope of Sir Gregory's ambition.

Present conditions and future hopes were humbly put before Lord Brentwood. His judgment was deferred to; his statesmanlike examination of probabilities and possibilities was humbly craved for. He satisfied himself—without advice or assistance from anybody—that the business of hotel-keeping was inexhaustibly lucrative, and that the new promotion was thoroughly justified by achieved results. There is always room on top, as Stuart told him. The new Darmstadt might diminish the prosperity of existing homes of luxury, but it could not itself fail—and probably its success would not seriously injure well-established rivals.

His original holding of £20,000 in Seasides had swollen automatically. With each new issue, expansion, or amalgamation, shares had been allotted to him. He had, too, recently bought a few shares at a high premium. He held now about £40,000; and, considering the yield—if kept up to the level of the last declared dividends,—he found that he derived therefrom more than £4000 per annum—over ten per cent for his investment. He gave instructions for the sale of gilt-edged securities, and subscribed £150,000 of the Darmstadt £1 ordin-

ary shares. This, as seems probable, will at the worst pay fifteen per cent—say twenty thousand a year gained straight away. But Stuart counts on far more than a fifteen per cent yield. Lord Brentwood a year ago had made up his mind to increase his income by reinvestment, and chance had now afforded him an easy opportunity.

He smiled at Mr. Killick's flabbergasted remonstrances; he cut short the old solicitor's wise maxims—"high interest means low security," and so forth. He knew all about that—he was not going into business blindfold.

"Your advice would be excellent if given to a poor man—but I am a rich man, taking the rich man's privilege of risking my money in order to get a good return for it. If I lose my stake—well, after all, I shan't perhaps greatly miss it."

This was a sort of lofty irrefutable argument that sadly scared Mr. Killick. Employed by another man, it might have sounded vulgarly pompous and purse-proud. In the mouth of Seymour Brentwood, it sounded innocently dignified, naively confident, and childishly dangerous. It was—as old Killick remorsefully realized—perhaps the logical outcome of his own lectures on money and the management of money. He had made difficulties in providing funds: now his client meant to provide them for himself.

Lord Brentwood, by a little further explanation, allowed this thought to be read very clearly. If things went as well as might be hoped, Mr. Killick should be saved much trouble. There would not be any more fuss in arranging for over-drafts at the bank—and that sort of thing. Rent collectors need not be bustled or defaulting tenants pressed, maintenance of estates might be free and handsome, outlay on improvements might continue unchecked. Another twenty or thirty thousand a year would carry one along very comfortably.

Sir Gregory and his co-directors had lately acquired offices on the first floor of a house in St. James's Street. This was the central office, where all the financial business of the hotels was transacted. Here, in many rooms, clerks were constantly toiling at intricate accounts and returns; here came managers and secretaries with their sheafs of papers; here came also

shareholders, inquirers, and newspaper men; and here now came the Earl of Brentwood. He was conducted with respectful delight to the newly upholstered board-room; his chair was larger than the other chairs; he presided at the board, with his new associates rapturously listening to his lightest words.

These preliminary meetings and discussions were soon over, and the prospectus was published to the world. The purchase price from the old Darmstadt company was half a million. The certified profits of the hotel were of course recited—not as any measure of future earnings, but merely as a matter of form. Then the full scheme was set forth:—to pull down the hotel, and rebuild the hotel; to clear away adjoining houses, and build an entirely new wing; to make a new restaurant; to dazzle and fascinate the universe with the richness, beauty, and taste of furniture and appointments. The authorized capital—debentures, preference, and ordinary—might strike one as somewhat large. Nineteen hundred thousand! But, at present, half of the scheme was being held over—the hotel would be refitted and not rebuilt, the restaurant would be practically rebuilt, the whole would be refurnished. This, therefore, was but a part issue of capital. The rest might follow in due course or not, as the wisdom of the directors should decide. But they intended and hoped to complete their scheme at no distant date.

It was a publication very different from that modest Beach-End prospectus. The enumeration of contracts and agreements seemed unending—agreement with the vestry of St. George's, agreement with the Commissioners of the Office of Woods, agreement with all sorts of unexpected persons and corporations; agreement with the Amalgamated Hotels Ltd., with Alfred William Copland, with Zavier Emile Nicolas.—Monsieur Nicolas was to remain as superintending manager of the restaurant for three years; and he bound himself, under heavy penalties, not to manage, superintend, advise, or lend his name to any other restaurant. A biographical sketch of Nicolas—drawn from materials supplied by Nicolas—told one how Nicolas had graduated with honors in such famous schools

as the Savoy, the Carlton, the Ritz; and how he had improved the tone, increased the receipts, and elevated the status of every eating-house that he had since entered. This was all in large print. The directorate was set up in capital letters:—"Chairman, the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Brentwood, P.C., G.C.M.G., etc. etc. etc.; Sir Gregory Stuart, K.C.M.G., M.P. (Chairman of Amalgamated Hotels Ltd.); Lionel Albert Malcomson, Esq. (Director of Amalgamated Hotels Ltd.); John Richard Tilney"—The big lettering and the solid names might inspire the most timid investor with confidence. "Advising-Secretary, E. D. Waller, Esq. (who will join the Board after allotment)—Brokers: Wace, Chandler, and Miles"—and so on, concluding with NOTICE in leaded type and red ink. "Not a penny of this issue has been underwritten!"

All this appeared in numberless newspapers, occupying three advertisement columns, "next to or facing matter of our City article." It was criticized in our City Article—not a very severe criticism, one may suppose. Indeed, our critics dealt with it indulgently, if not eulogistically. *The Times* critic was perhaps too guarded in manner to give pleasure to the authors.—"This is another of the huge hotel ventures which in the past decade have become so numerous. The debentures at the low rate of four per cent are not attractive. The six per cent preference would seem to be well secured. With regard to the ordinary shares: all one can say is, that if the anticipations of the promoters are fulfilled, they give a prospect of a very large return. In estimating the future value of this particular class of investment, it is of course always advisable to bear in mind that the instability of fashion and the rapidly changing habits of well-to-do Londoners necessarily form adverse factors, for which full allowance should be made. . . . It is announced that the lists will close on Tuesday next or earlier."

The lists in fact closed earlier. All that Sir Gregory foretold came to pass. The Company went off with a bang, the investing public rushed at it, the money poured in.—"I told you so," cried Stuart enthusiastically. "Brentwood has done the trick for us."

XXXII

REALLY it seemed that Copland had gnomes and fairies working with him and for him. The New Darmstadt Restaurant was opened, and in full swing, before trade rivals had time to tremble at the formidable opposition with which they were threatened. Never had a quicker thing been done. So far as trade rivals were concerned, it was a word and a blow —almost a knock-down blow.

You were invited to look at the kitchens—cool vaults and raging furnaces, silver cooking utensils, aquarium with doomed fish, and so on. Is there anything like this in London? Have we kept our promises? No chance of a beetle getting into a *vol au vent* in this establishment.

The style of the great eating-room was ultra-French—so that you thought you were in Paris—Paris of the second empire. Perhaps the decoration had not cost quite as much as might be supposed. White walls, narrow curtains of golden tissue, crystal chandeliers, looking-glass doors and panels divided into small panes,—nothing could be more tasteful or effective. The wine glasses with the Darmstadt coat of arms had been specially made in Bohemia; the food was of course all *a la carte;* and the charges were truly fiendish.

Here, Lord Brentwood presided at many dinners. One was to the representatives of the Press—before the place had been publicly opened,—and by request he wore his new star and sash. He did not wish so to beautify himself, but he yielded to Sir Gregory's entreaties. Stuart said the newspaper gentlemen would be gratified, and he wanted to wear his own little "tin-plate." Then there was a dinner to what Mr. Waller called 'the big-wigs and fashionables." Then, after the opening, there were dinners to personal friends.

All this hotel work brought Seymour again among the frivolous people—the very modish coteries,—and gave him, as he could not but appreciate, a new and different weight and importance. The pretty ladies of society, the bucks and fops, welcomed him as warmly as he had been welcomed by the

sirens and the wits. "You do belong to us," they seemed to say. "Only you have been taking yourself so seriously. But show yourself light-hearted and laugh with us, and you shall be a leader—a prince of leaders—among us, as well as among your stupid Government sets. . . . We love your Darmstadt, and bless you for inventing it."

Seymour Brentwood's restaurant, then, made a hit at once. It delighted, it captivated. Nothing much socially was going on at this time of year—so the best society fastened upon the Darmstadt as if it had been a toy. Using the Darmstadt was like playing some new fashionable game. The vulgar millionaires entertained at it—their highest patrons freely hinted that they would with gladness be entertained there. The "biggest swells" could be seen there,—the embassies made it a sort of international ambassadorial club-room,—the actresses supped there. One could study famous post-card loveliness at close range—very amusing study for neglected wives and sisters long cognizant of the strength of the siren-spell!—"Which one is it?" Edie Danvers, clothed in lattice-work of diamonds, and, though so lightly clad, fanning herself vigorously; Mlle. Zenaire, wrapt to the throat in a blouse, afraid of taking cold after dancing among the bullrushes without any wrappings at all; Miss Vickie Ball, the tow-haired celebrity who impersonates guardsmen, and puffs a big cigar between her snatches of song at the music-halls;—they all went there. Everybody went there. Young married women would cut the longest engagements, to go there with their favorite young men,—would sit all night, through dinner, on to supper, watching the actresses come in,—would refuse to budge from table till the lights were turned down and head waiters murmured apologetically of licensing laws and police. Tables were booked weeks ahead. The Darmstadt was *the* thing to do—smarter than the smartest private houses.

Irene Malcomson was quick to take up this game. She procured a willing chaperon—a well-born, middle-aged spinster Miss Haines-Cole—to help her play the game without interference from faint-hearted, breathless, Bayswaterish Mamma. She went to her dressmaker in Albemarle Street, and clever

Antoinette made her dinner frocks to show up well against the white walls—a red tulle, a green lace, a coffee gauze. She and the frocks showed so well at her corner table that all the world noticed her, wondered who she was, and learned her name. She must be *some*body to have a table night after night. Indeed, absurd as it sounds, the Darmstadt did more for Irene than had been done by Andover House—or, coming on top of that, it carried her fairly into smart society.

How was she sure of a table? Perhaps Monsieur Nicolas had seen her in company with Lord Brentwood, his chairman. Or Sir Gregory had bid Nicolas prostrate himself at her feet, and say that it was where Sir Gregory already lay. Anyhow, the infinitely insolent Nicolas bowed and smiled whenever she appeared,—put flowers on her table and never entered them in the bill,—came always to her table and asked if Mademoiselle had dined well. People saw the flowers on the table. No one but millionaires could afford a blossom or a bud at the Darmstadt—"Floraison en garniture: £9 17*s.* 6*d.*"

It caused people to gape.

People desired the acquaintance of this young lady, asked her to visit them. "Do you know Irene Malcomson? A lot of people are taking her up. She's clever—makes people laugh. Nicolas told me people beg him to put them at the table next hers—so that they can hear what she says. It makes them laugh."

The insolence of Nicolas was unbelievable. He swaggered about the threshold, blinking his fat eyelids, pursing his blubber lips, deserving to be kicked. His frock coat, buttoned tightly round his stomach, displayed ridges that were formed by his belt stays; his tie was a prodigious black bow, which he constantly readjusted—he did not at any hour appear in evening dress. To second-class people—to all Bayswater except Irene—he was atrociously rude: not listening to them, shrugging his shoulders, turning his back. Wonderful to think that he never was kicked. But he knew the world, he knew human nature. He could not be too rude. He could not charge too much. The fools liked to be fleeced and insulted.

Idiotic women abjectly pleaded with him. "Can't you

squeeze my party in to-night—find me a table somehow, in any corner?" "Corner!" said Nicolas. "My corners are what all search. I wish I had a hundred corners." And the lady pointed to tables. "Is *that* engaged to-night?"

"Indeed and yes. That is the Ambassador's table. Son Excellence will occupy it all nights this week."

"Then *that* table?"

"It is the Arch-Duke," said Nicolas, staring at the empty table as if he saw His Royal and Imperial Highness now sitting at it. "You will not ask me to turn him away, to be complaisant to Madame," and Nicolas looked insufferably impudent.

"Oh, *no*," said the lady piteously,—"but do, *please*, try.—If there is a disappointment, telephone to me—however late——"

But M. Nicolas was busy pulling the folds of his black tie. He shrugged his shoulders, bowed, turned his fat back. "Desolated to refuse to do the impossible," said Monsieur; and the lady went away—not to fetch a man to kick him for her, but to shed tears of mortification. She had set her heart on being at the Darmstadt to-night.

Perhaps the wretch carefully picked his victims, and secretly dreaded the boot.

One evening Miss Danvers sent him across the room with a message to Sir Gregory Stuart. Miss Danvers' compliments to Sir Gregory, who, she understands, has an interest in the management:—She is pleased with the cutlets and *soubise a la Darmstadt;* she has nothing to complain of; and will Sir Gregory go over and drink his liqueur with her? Sir Gregory sent no return message. Later, in the vestibule, he passed Miss Danvers as though he did not know her. She was surrounded by admirers, and he regarded her with fish-like, inscrutable eyes.

After this, Edie and her diamonds were seen no more at the Darmstadt. The Deputy-Chairman told Nicolas to tell her that there was no table for her—not to-night, or any night. There never would be a table for her. Perhaps on this occasion Nicolas felt himself perilously near a booting. Miss Danvers

had stalwart admirers. But Nicolas did his duty: the Deputy-Chairman was obeyed, and never again was worried by Edie.

He received no messages of criticism or invitation from the table where so often sat the beautiful Miss Malcomson. But to that table he was always coming—with or without pretext, he could not keep away from it. In newspaper paragraphs describing the Darmstadt and its guests, she was spoken of regularly as "the beautiful Miss Malcomson"—and perhaps Sir Gregory had inserted the adjective, when lists of the restaurant customers were being despatched from the publicity department. He brought a newspaper and showed her such a paragraph.

"Do you see what they call you? Quite right too. I think so more than ever."

He would stand by her side, purple from admiration, with one coarse hand resting on the white damask, the other hanging clumsily clenched, while he breathed apoplectically above her bronze hair. He would not, or could not tear himself away.

"But you are deserting your friends, Sir Gregory."

"Oh, never mind them—they're all right. They are people I don't care twopence about. They can eat their dinner without *me*. I'll be there to pay for it;" and he stooped to whisper. "*You* know who I care about. However long—I'll be of the same mind, fair lady."

Until Parliament reassembled in February, Seymour thought little of politics. He kept the pledge, however, that he had given so lightly, and provided funds for the new Party newspaper. In this journal—staggering from its first number to certain destruction—he saw his portrait as a Man of the Hour, and read a page and a half of twaddle about his extraordinary versatility, popularity, business acumen. That was all he got for his outlay. He had done a foolish thing in believing that the heavily capitalized organ could bring good to him or the Party.

But during this winter he did many foolish things—too many

to count or remember. He was spending money with reckless profusion—as if he had come into another vast fortune—anticipating future dividends from his successful hotels. He gave largely in promiscuous charity, put his name down for a thousand pounds, instead of five hundred, on all lists that at a glance appeared to show worthy objects. He gave almost to all who asked him to give.

Very soon after Christmas Sir Gregory Stuart was busy again with a further issue of capital. Profits of the Darmstadt Restaurant for one month and seventeen days to December 31 were magnificent, surpassed one's hopes; no need to hesitate; the great scheme might go on without delay. Adjoining houses in Brook Street must be pulled down; new wings should be begun at once. Again the public responded to the call—more Preference taken up greedily, Ordinary distributed in heavy allotments to existing shareholders.

Lord Brentwood had done another foolish thing just then. He had chartered an immense steam yacht for a cruise in the Mediterranean, and now he could not use it. He felt bound to stay in London and attend to business. The vessel steamed to Marseilles, and lay there three weeks—waiting for him. He could not get away himself, but he asked Gladys to go without him. She was seedy, wanted change of air—would like to see Venice. She might take a party of congenial friends, and thoroughly enjoy herself. But Gladys did not feel inclined to accept this offer. Then he paid forfeit to the fortunate yacht-owner, and that gentleman went to Marseilles and had a pleasant free cruise in his own boat.

The Darmstadt chairman never shirked board meetings. He was in the chair as often as his presence could be required. He sat through all discussions, listened courteously to the wearisome formalities of Stuart, Waller, and the others. He looked most prince-like, seated among these plebeians—Malcomson, massive and sombre; Adams, fat and broad and smug; Tilney, a rattish, bilious little man;—all of them common as dirt when compared with their Chairman. While they talked together of sordid trade details, he was idly sketching faces on the blotting paper before him, was dreaming. The splendid

outward aspect of the man was there, but the man himself was far away.

Sir Gregory was talking about the new Ordinary, Mr. Tilney was acquiescing, Mr. Malcomson was demurring—the Chairman nodded gravely, heard without really hearing. The Chairman's mind had wandered. He was thinking of another and different sort of meeting, now being held in Downing Street. To-day the Cabinet had come together again. That was where he ought to have been, with the rulers of the nation: not here, with these money-making vulgarians.

Sir Gregory said that he and his co-directors should make "a dollop of money" out of their allotments, and not hang on to them. It would be right and proper to sell these allotments. "They forestall the future—they represent the profit we forego for the good of the general public."

Then Mr. Malcomson demurred, and spoke of the interests of other shareholders.

"Shareholders," declared Stuart forcibly, "are such dashed fools that they never understand. But I always say, take them into one's confidence—so I would propose to tell them, at the special meeting next month, exactly what we are doing—exactly how we stand . . . "

Lord Brentwood roused himself from his dreams, laid down his pencil, and expressed concurrence with Sir Gregory's last observations. He would wish the shareholders to be enlightened on all points of management. Tell them everything, let them know all that there is to be known, whether it be usual or not to give such information.

"I agree heartily with our chairman," said Mr. Tilney.

"I, too," said Mr. Adams, "endorse all his words. It is precisely what I would wish myself."

"Then we are all agreed," said Sir Gregory cheerfully.

Lord Brentwood picked up his pencil, began again to sketch profiles, to dream. He looked at Malcomson's heavy side face, and thought of Malcomson's pretty daughter. Till the end of the meeting, he drew outlines of Irene's fine nose, eyes, and well-modelled but large mouth.

XXXIII

OF all the foolish things done by Lord Brentwood, the most supremely foolish was his encouragement of Miss Irene Malcomson. That old act of kindness and Irene's grateful thanks should have been the end of their intercourse. He had pitied poor Irene in her dire disgrace, and had helped to lift the dark cloud for her. Now, Irene was restored to social sunshine, needed no more pitiful aid, and could make no claim on one's chivalrous consideration. His better judgment told him that Irene should be dropped out of the busy sphere of one's thought and care.

But, in fact, they became on more and more friendly terms. Her gratitude knew no bounds, and would consent to no time limits—she was never tired of thanking him openly or insidiously. She flattered his vanity by assuming the attitude of a loyal subject to a benign prince. He had deigned to protect her—she could not forget it. She flattered him by the interest she betrayed in all that concerned him; she hung upon his words; she brightened and flashed at the sight of him. Whenever they were alone, she spoke with admiration of his success as a politician. Very soon a somewhat disquieting thought occurred to him. He drove away the thought, as something fatuous, conceited, and baseless; but the thought came back the very next time they happened to meet. In spite of himself, he thought again that the admiration of this brilliant young lady was warmer, fuller, altogether more personal than had been fairly won by the public success of a hard-working Under-Secretary of State; and further, that Irene was not unwilling that he should so read her feelings.

Nevertheless, the friendly intercourse continued. The Darmstadt was a meeting place for all the world. One must not go there, if one wished to avoid one's acquaintances. Business rather than pleasure took Seymour to the Darmstadt. My lord chairman could not be seen there too often. If he chanced to be dining alone, he was bidden to take a place at Miss Irene's corner table. People saw the chairman sitting

in the corner with Miss Malcomson and Miss Haines-Cole, and began to talk—connecting the name of their chairman with that of Miss Irene, and not with the name of Miss Cole. Once or twice he relieved the chaperon of her final duty, and drove Miss Irene home to Bayswater in his motor-car. She was in a hurry to get home that evening—Papa and Mamma might be anxious. Miss Cole was packed off in a four-wheeler, and my Lord whisked Irene back to Bayswater quite as swiftly as she wished.

She was clever and amusing, and rather handsome—as everybody was saying. However, her beauty, such as it was, he admired without being attracted by it. What made her an agreeable companion was her quickness of apprehension: she always understood one, could sometimes supply the very words of an unspoken thought. And he was conscious that she possessed a certain fascination, very difficult to analyze, but easy to feel, if one purposely gave oneself to its promptly exerted power. It was a faintly disturbing excitement, that stimulated one to respond by an effort to please, if one could, in one's turn. Perhaps the essence of the fascination lay in the sense of mystery—the secret depths beneath the glowing surface, a hint of explosive force waiting to be released, buried fires that would leap upward.

He could understand that if one wilfully yielded to this particular sort of fascination, it would rapidly gain strength, and then it might be very powerful indeed.

So the acquaintance went on, and he had not the least idea that gossiping Darmstadt guests whispered about it. Irene confided to him all her little troubles, told him she was not very happy at home, seemed always to be appealing to him for sympathy. She used to write to him—short letters asking if he would be at the Darmstadt to-morrow, and long letters about politics, books, and the new exhibition of realistic French pictures at a Bond Street gallery. In his opinion, she wrote too many letters for a busy man to answer; and he answered very few of them.

"Have I offended you?" asked Irene. "Are you angry with me?" And then he was again conscious of the fascina-

tion. Why should he be angry? What right had he to be angry? And how could his anger matter to her? But she was looking at him with troubled and troubling eyes, as though the dread of his ire distressed her excessively. It was her old attitude of the submissive grateful subject to the protecting prince,—but he felt it hard to resist the sudden pleasurably gratifying sensations produced by the submissiveness and the fascination together.

She gave him so much of her confidence that it could not strike him as unnatural when she wooed confidence from him. He would not, however, allow her to lift their light and casual friendliness to this higher level of intimacy. She boasted once of the quick understanding which he had himself observed in her. "I believe I understand you," she said, "better than anyone else. You are always dreaming of the great things that you will one day bring to pass. Why won't you ever tell me of your dreams? I know they are all noble and good—and that they ought to come true." But his dreams and ambitions, as he tried to convey to her explicitly, were his own, and not by any means matters that he could discuss with chance acquaintances. Then, after a little while, she asked him to promote her,—to make her a real friend.

This was when for the third time he was chaperoning her in his motor-car. It was the last time that he gave Irene a lift home to Bayswater; and before he set her down at her door, he had arrived at the very definite conclusion that his best course would be to avoid her altogether for the future.

For a moment he had felt that she was weaving spells of cumulative power, and that he could not break them down too soon. He had felt the fascination not faintly, but strongly. He knew now that Irene might be a very dangerous enchantress to anyone who challenged her to put forth her strength and test all her spells.

He dropped Miss Malcomson, and at first it was a relief to be done with her. But then he discovered that Irene kept at a distance could still make one think about her. He had expected letters from her; but she wrote to him no more. He had been prepared for some sort of protest against a sudden

change of manner, and a lack of attention that of course she would notice. She had asked to be treated as a real friend, and his answer had been complete neglect. To his surprise, she did not protest or demand any explanation. She smiled at him, and nodded carelessly, sent her love to his wife—and did not invite him to sit at her table, to meet her at the picture gallery in Bond Street, or to come to tea at Bayswater and have another pleasant chat about the political situation.

Seeing her at a considerable distance—the whole length of the Darmstadt restaurant,—she proved her thought-impelling power very decisively; and the more she made him think about her, the more uncomfortable he became. He had been—perhaps for the first time in his life—a fatuous, conceited idiot. The thought made him quite hot. She had correctly interpreted his cautious reserve; she had read all his thoughts—and she was showing him, as plainly as she could, that he had committed an unpardonable blunder.

Then, next time they met, he was considerably reassured. She had not perhaps noticed anything, or thought anything. He had worried himself without the slightest cause. There had been no need to drop Miss Irene; and she had not been aware of the drop. All the trouble was in himself. She was just the same as ever: friendly, amusing, clever.

He ceased to think of her. Parliament was opened, and all his thought now was absorbed by budget, estimate, votes to reduce.

He could wait for Governmental recognition, but he intended this session to make his chief sorry that Seymour Brentwood had been left out of the Cabinet. He could think of nothing else.

Irene was almost forgotten, when unexpectedly she presented another petition for assistance in a little difficulty. He hesitated a moment, but granted the petition.

During this dull winter, it had become a habit with Gladys Brentwood to go for long solitary drives. Despite of February storms and the cutting winds of early March, she always used an open carriage. She started every day at dusk, and stayed out as long as her coachman would permit.

"Take me as far as you can without tiring the horses," she told the coachman. "Somewhere out of London, if that won't be too much for them. They may stop and rest themselves whenever you like."

The coachman took her far out of the crowded streets sometimes—let his horses walk and get their wind on the other side of Hampstead, on Richmond Hill, or on Wimbledon Common, and then jog slowly homeward from the quiet and the darkness to the noise and light. The horses trotted bravely again when they reached and mingled with the great streams of traffic in the four-mile circle. The coachman said it was fine conditioning work for the horses, and felt proud to think that he, and no swaggering chauffeurs, had the task of conducting my lady.

A favorite drive was through Chelsea, by the river, then on to Putney, up the hill to Putney heath, and back by Roehampton, Barnes, and Hammersmith. Lady Brentwood one afternoon stopped the carriage on the Chelsea Embankment, left it, and walked by herself beneath the leafless plane trees. As she watched the broad river, she was thinking of her youth. The last flush of the sunset was dying from the sky; lamps began to come out brightly, showing how soon it would be dark; it was a gray sad view at which to stand staring with dim eyes, but it was no grayer or more sad than her own thoughts. She returned to the carriage, and drove on. The horses clattered noisily over the stone-flagged bridge at Putney, passed the flaring shop-windows of the High Street, and with unchecked swing bowled up the hill, to breathe themselves on the heath. It was quite dark now,—trees on one side, walls of gardens on the other. While the horses stood for a few minutes, she sat thinking of her love. Nothing to look at now but blackness and blankness. Somewhere near here they had walked together, on the day when they agreed that it would be best for them to part. Not far from here.—In daylight she could have retraced the path they had taken side by side.

"Thank you," she said, when she got home. "That was a very nice drive," and she glanced at the horses. "I hope they are not too tired."

"Oh, no, my lady," said the coachman. "And I hope you wasn't cold."

"No, thank you. I am well wrapt up. . . . If they aren't tired, I'll go again to-morrow."

"It will be a fresh pair to-morrow, my lady."

"Will it? Then please think of somewhere to take me—as far as we can go. Goodnight.—I'll start to-morrow at the same time."

It was almost as if Andover House had been haunted—as if the restless spirit of the dead lord came to her when night began to fall, and sent her in fear from its shadowy halls and corridors. While the daylight lasted, she could stay indoors, and again when lamplight was blazing; but when the shadows slowly deepened and gray dusk filled the lofty rooms, she must escape.

In truth she was desperately lonely in her grand home. Since the opening of Parliament, her husband had almost vanished from home life. She was so lonely that she welcomed any company—even of people whom she did not love or trust. She agreed at once when Irene proposed to come and stay at Andover House.

The beautiful Miss Malcomson—as the newspapers called her—invited herself for a fortnight. The doctors had ordered Mr. Malcomson to take his wife to the South of France, and Irene was to go with them; but Irene had engagements just now,—she could not leave London in a tearing hurry, without sufficient warning. She must have two weeks at least to get through the gaieties provided for her by fashionable Darmstadt friends; and then she would dutifully follow her parents to Mentone, and take care of Mamma while Papa returned to his business. There were stormy scenes in Bayswater before Irene proved that now, as always, she would do what she wanted to do, and not what she was asked to do by anybody else.

Papa and Mamma—as she explained—were utterly unreasonable. They would not allow her to remain quietly at home; they did not consider Miss Haines-Cole an adequate chaperon; they were making a ridiculous fuss about nothing. Would Lord Brentwood and her dear Gladys extend to her the

traditional hospitality of Andover House? If they could put her up for two weeks, the silly opposition of Mamma would immediately be vanquished, and she would set out for Mentone easy in her mind.

"Yes," said Gladys, "I shall be glad to have you here."

Irene said that Gladys was an angel. She knew of course that in this great house, with its army of servants, the presence of one person more or less could make no difference to anybody. She assured dear Gladys that she would make no difference. She promised that she would be in nobody's way: all she craved was shelter and protection; she would go out all day and nearly every evening;—and as to Lord Brentwood, harassed by National affairs as well as his innumerable social duties, he should not be aware that she was living under his palatial roof.

"I shall be so grateful, Gladys, if you really don't mind."

"No, I am very pleased."

"And it is understood that I shan't expect either of you to bother about me—that's the understanding. I said so to Lord Brentwood when I told him that I meant to ask you, and he said he did not mind."

"Oh, you spoke to Seymour about it. When was that?"

"Last night—at the Darmstadt."

"Oh. He did not tell me—but he has so much to think of. . . . When are you coming?"

"To-morrow—I would like to come to-morrow, if you are sure you don't mind."

Then Miss Irene gave grateful thanks, and expressed some polite anxiety as to the health of her hostess.

"Gladys, you are not looking a bit like your old self—and you say you feel seedy. What is it?"

"I think I have caught a chill—driving. The wind has been so cold lately."

Next day Lady Brentwood was too ill to take her customary drive. Dr. Prescott of Hertford Street condemned her to remain a prisoner in her room, paying the penalty of her imprudence. Dr. Prescott, summoned by her maid, was shocked by the story of these open air drives at such an inclement

season of the year. Really her ladyship had been most reckless, and might have anticipated this very natural result. She was suffering from the effects of a violent chill, and she must positively stay in doors until Dr. Prescott could make her well again. If she obeyed Dr. Prescott, and nursed herself carefully, he would soon accomplish the cure; but if she attempted to make light of her physician's advice, the consequences might be very serious indeed.

Irene, arriving with a French maid and half a dozen cumbrous boxes late in the afternoon, was informed of the indisposition of her hostess, and admitted for a few minutes to the sick room. She found the patient feverish, and shivering, racked with headache, and quite unfit for society.

"Poor Gladys, I *am* so sorry.—But don't give me a thought."

And so it happened that, for any personal entertainment, the visitor must look to the master of the house, and not to her hostess. If the host could possibly have foreseen that Lady Brentwood would be off duty, this guest would not have been here.

She had promised not to be in anybody's way, but she did not keep her promise. She was very much in the way. Big as the house was, Lord Brentwood was always encountering her. His wife lay ill—but if he wanted anyone with whom to talk politics, he might now be sure of an intelligent companion: someone ready to listen and to understand, to palpitate with interest, to glow with enthusiasm. But if he was not in the vein for animated conversation, he found it difficult to secure solitude. He retired to his secret retreat—it was the only part of the house where the visitor could not get in his way.

Returning to the house at night, he used to let himself in by his private side door. He went into his rooms, and sat there, silent and brooding, or scribbling notes for future speeches. No one could disturb him there. If he had come through the hall, the servants might have given him a message from the visitor. Miss Malcomson just back from bridge-

party or theatre, and ready for more talk! He was often too tired for Irene's chatter.

She had said that she was full of engagements, but they did not seem to be of an absorbing nature.

One night when he dined at home, he was surprised to find the dinner table laid for two people. He was pleased to think that the invalid now felt well enough to come down again. The servants, however, told him that the extra place would not be occupied by her ladyship: it was for Miss Malcomson.

But Miss Malcomson intended to dine out to-night! He knew that, because she had told him so herself. Quite true—Irene *ought* to have been dining out; but she had changed her mind,—been compelled to disappoint kind friends. She thought she had been doing too much lately. Nervous headache this afternoon—almost a crisis of nerves.

He waited for her at the foot of the stairs; and she appeared presently, to tell him about the headache and the nerves.

"Don't I look like a ghost? When I saw myself in the glass just now, I felt inclined to send Adele to buy me some rouge. . . . I thought I wouldn't come down—I thought I might frighten you."

She looked more like a draped statue than a ghost—extraordinarily pale, all the glow and color gone. It really was very remarkable. Her face was nearly as white as her arms; even her lips seemed bloodless. Lord Brentwood was preoccupied with his own thoughts, desired no companion, and found the effort of making conversation extremely irksome; but he could not help watching her face at dinner—and all the color and fire of life rapidly returning. She was quite herself again before long, smiling and flashing and saying that the headache had completely passed. She ate very little, but she talked a lot, exciting herself; and at last her lips were bright red, and her violet eyes darkly lustrous.

"Now you are not to bother about me," said Irene, after dinner. "I shall go up and see Gladys—and you will go and hide yourself."

"Will you think me rude, if I do? I have some papers that I ought to read."

"Of course I shan't think you rude. . . . But, first, will you show me the place you call your working room? Or is it wrong to ask that? I know it is the Bluebeard's Chamber of Andover House—but may not one even see it, in charge of Bluebeard himself?"

Lord Brentwood good-naturedly consented to gratify his guest's curiosity, and led her through the library, through the double sound-resisting doors, into his private apartments. Irene, following with awe-struck interest, had somewhat the air of a courteous representative of the Press, and Seymour felt a little of the embarrassment of a celebrated person being "interviewed."

Yes, this was the working room.—Yes, that was the desk at which he sat and worked. Nothing to see, really—nothing worth looking at. Yes, those are blue books, and all the little protruding slips of paper mark passages that are to be carefully studied. All those manuscript and type-written papers have been prepared by my lord's secretaries.—They are the rough materials to be worked into polished form—or ammunition with which big guns habitually load themselves before going off in the warfare of parliamentary debate.

"Yes, I must get through all that and a good deal more this evening."

"You work too hard. You work here late at night—half through the night, when everybody is asleep;" and Irene looked at him with admiring pity. "That's why I wanted to see the place—I have thought of you, hidden in here, still working when all the house is sleeping."

Lord Brentwood confessed that he was sometimes busily occupied in here at an advanced hour. But he certainly did not work too hard—he liked the work.

Everything impressed Irene; nothing was too trivial for her admiring scrutiny. She was impressed by the severe simplicity of the furniture. She said it was a real *man's* room—like a room in one of the grand old dignified clubs. One felt that feminine taste had never been consulted when this room was made. She looked reverently at the busts on the tall black pedestals—great statesmen! "That's Pitt, isn't

it? And Cobden?"—she looked at the lamp on the big desk, at the huge inkpots, the battery of pens, the fields of immaculate blotting paper—"You always write with a quill, don't you?"—she looked at the sombre carpet and the shining parquetry, at the rigid folds of dark-toned window curtains, at the leather-covered chairs round the walls, and the leather-covered couch wheeled forward in front of the crackling wood fire—Everything interested her, everything impressed her with awe or admiration.

"You throw yourself down on this," said Irene, with very much the manner of a professional interviewer, as she laid her white hand on the brown leather back of the sofa. "You throw yourself down and rest when you are worn out—or while you think. And then you go back to the desk and work again."

"Oh, no," said Lord Brentwood, laughing at Miss Irene's anxiously inquiring voice and too excited manner. "When I throw myself on that, I take forty winks before I get up again."

"Yes, and you ought to rest—you work too long. . . . Now show me the other room. This isn't the only room."

He turned on the light in the middle room, and she saw the big table provided by Marlow for a conclave of Ambassadors and foreign secretaries, or for little dinners to artists, singers, dancers not on the house-list. It had been used once for the sirens: Mademoiselle Zenaire had danced round it; but as yet no sitting of accredited plenipotentiaries had occurred. He turned on more lights, and showed her the outer room, from which Marlow and his men had served that Sunday repast. Marlow meant it for such a purpose, or for the reception of messengers bearing state despatches. The messengers had not yet appeared.

Irene must see all the secret suite, and would not be content till Seymour turned on still more lights, and showed her the stone lobby and stairs, and the little *porte derobée* so skilfully contrived by Marlow for so many different uses.

"That's where you come in and go out," said Irene, drawing her breath fast in the intensity of her interest. "So that nobody knows if you are in the house or not. You come in

this way at night. I asked the servant, when I came back yesterday evening, if you were in—and he told me you might be in or not, but you rarely came in by his door."

"Thank you very much," said Irene, when they returned to the inner room and Lord Brentwood was ushering his visitor towards the library. "I have wasted ten minutes for you—but I did so want to see it. I was devoured by inquisitiveness. . . . I like Prince Bluebeard's chamber—I like all places of silence and mystery. . . . Now I'll go up to Gladys—and may I sit in the library when I come down?"

A fire was burning brightly at each end of the long library. Of course she might sit there. My lord moved an arm-chair for her, and then retired into his own room to do his work.

The work was of the very highest importance, and he had determined to devote to it unstinted time and energy. On Tuesday or Wednesday next week the Lords intended to make a night of it—as they were forced to do sometimes, if only to show the world that they as well as the noisy Commons could sit up till cock-crow.

There would be a tremendous attack by the Opposition, battle stayed by consent to let my lords get a snack of dinner; and then at nine o'clock the battle would rage again—nobly oblivious of home or bed, my lords would fight it out. Some time after dinner, Lord Brentwood would be put upon his legs—and this, as he knew, was a real chance to distinguish himself. On such nights as these, a reputation may be made or marred; lieutenants may prove that they are strong enough to be commanders; famous generals can disastrously disclose their incompetence to lead. Seymour proposed to give his audience a long, solid, eye-opening, statesmanlike oration; and he intended to spare no pains in preparing it. He had been making copious notes for his speech, and he was to make more notes now.

He could not get on with the task—the quill pen was waiting to jot down the well-turned phrases, but no impetus came to set it in movement. Nothing came—no digested facts, no shrewd deductions, no illuminating reflections. His mind was blank. He got up, walked about the room, as if seeking ideas

that he had mislaid in odd corners. He was disgusted with himself for his incapacity to make any sort of intellectual effort. There would be no speech at all, if his present state of incapacity continued till next Tuesday. Then he thought with irritation that this intellectual collapse had been directly caused by the troublesome visitor. All the chatter just now had enervated him: Irene with her interviewing tricks had put him off his work.

He stood on the hearthrug, watching the flame leap from the crackling logs, and thought about her—and in a moment she filled all the blank in his mind, filled it to overflowing. He thought of her statuesque throat, and the defiant carriage of the head, changing so quickly to a languorous droop—as if the weight of all that bronze hair had become in a moment too heavy to support. He thought of everything that had a part in composing her beauty, such as it was—the tallness, the supple serpentlike grace of her figure, the thin nose with the wide over-sensitive nostrils, the large mobile lips, the wonderful eyes with the dark, veiling lashes and the white heavy lids. The sternest critic must confess that her eyes were wonderful—such a true violet in daylight, with a faint bluish shadow round them, as if their color tinged the flesh; and in lamplight, when the pupils dilated, they seemed almost black, flashing purple flame in smoky orbits. Yet he had once thought her commonplace and uninteresting, and he did not even now consider her really beautiful.

Then he thought of her redness and her whiteness—the unexpected pallors and flushings, the blood drawn away from the red lips and then rising to the surface. She was a creature of nerves, subject to quite abnormal fluctuations of nervous energy.—She as good as told one that herself. Headache and lassitude this afternoon,—and half a glass of wine, three minutes' gossip, and a complete recovery effected. He thought she was the most easily excited person that he had ever had an opportunity of observing. The excitement was always there, suppressed often, but never dissipated. The moment you aroused her interest, the excitement escaped control. She seemed absolutely to possess a disturbing atmosphere—as if

she spread excitement, sent it out in vibrating waves to reach the nerves of others. That was why as a companion she tired one.

And he thought with fretful anger that she had spoilt his evening. He felt angry with himself, but more angry with her. The last person in the world that one wanted in a house where the mistress lay ill, and the master was up to his eyes in hard work! Not a person to be admitted to the intimacy of one's home life, to one's unguarded friendship or one's unrestricted confidence. Once he had told his wife that this girl was impossible.—If for no other reason, her reputation rendered frank, untroubled intercourse out of the question. One could not forget those scandalous rumors. True or false, the memory of them must perpetually come creeping back to one's mind. And such thoughts were unfair to her, and disturbing to oneself. They made one see temptation and allurement in natural vivacity, made one search for concealed meanings in the simplest and most conventional courtesies. A vexatious necessity, to keep her at arm's length!

When he opened the library door, she looked up with a delighted smile and rose from her chair by the fire.

"Has your Highness taken pity on me?" she asked gaily. "Can it be that you have stopped work—because I was all alone, with no one to talk to me?"

"I couldn't work. Did you see Gladys? How is she?"

"Very well—I mean, much better."

"Oh! Then I think I'll go up to her.—Or perhaps it is too late."

"Tell me why you couldn't work."

"Oh, never mind my work," he said abruptly and irritably. "My work is not of the smallest consequence to anybody, and probably never will be. If I struck work for ever, the world would be none the poorer."

"Why do you say that? It is not true."

She leaned her arm on the mantelpiece, lifted her head, and looked at him with an intently earnest gaze.

"You can do anything you like, if you try," she went on

slowly. "Think what you have done already." And then, in a low, eager voice, she began to flatter him, openly, grossly. If she had been Sir William himself, soothing and cajoling, she could not have poured out richer praise.

Lord Brentwood stopped her with a discontented gesture and a constrained laugh.

"Thank you—you're very kind. But I know myself too well. I have done *nothing;* I never shall do anything now." And he told her bitterly that her praise had been painfully jarring at this particular moment, because he was now an almost acknowledged failure in politics, as he had been a failure in all other things throughout his life.

"It's not true," said Irene eagerly. "You couldn't fail—whatever you attempted. You should believe in yourself.—But I know what it is. I can understand why you should feel like this. It is only that you have been too fortunate. Everything has been given to you. But there are always some new worlds left to conquer"—and she flattered him again, even more grossly than before.

Lord Brentwood stopped her for the second time; told her that he had been speaking seriously, and that her compliments prevented serious talk.

"I am sorry," said Irene, humbly begging his pardon. All that she had said she genuinely meant, but she was wrong to interrupt. She ought to have listened without interrupting.

"But it's not worth talking of seriously," he said. "There's nothing really serious in it—just egotistic disgust. What on earth does it matter? Some one said we ought to be like steam engines, and consume our own smoke,—but that's easier said than done—except for philosophers."

"But what has caused you to doubt yourself?"

"Other people don't believe in me—the Cabinet don't believe in me—and they're right, for I don't believe in myself. I can't concentrate—and stick firmly to one aim. I have no originality—or initiative. . . . I go on dreaming, and let other people decide on my actions. I don't decide myself."

"You are tired and depressed—or you would not have such fancies."

"They are facts, not fancies—the ugly truth that obtrudes itself upon one, just when most of all one wants to stand firm and resolute, and act instead of dream. It isn't in me to do it. . . . That's how I feel about my work. I do what others make me do"—and he looked at her white arm and the hand that suddenly clenched itself, and his thought wandered. "I—I go down lines of least resistance—infallibly—because I . . . What was I saying? . . . I don't decide for myself."

"Is that true?" said Irene. "No, that can't be true." She was glowing with interest, palpitating with sympathy. "Doubt comes to the strongest men—the strongest men need help and sympathy sometimes, to cheer them in their dark hours. . . . Don't give way to doubt. Believe in yourself."

"That's excellent advice."

"I wanted you to talk to me like this. It is how I hoped you'd talk to me some day—because I think I understand you—and because——" She took her hand from the marble ledge and put it in front of her mouth, as if to hide the wavering of her red lips—"because I think I could help you."

"I don't think you or anyone else could help me. I am past help."

"Try me," said Irene. "I asked you once before. Why won't you have confidence in me? Give me your thoughts—your real thoughts. Make me the one friend to whom you can tell anything. . . . I see—I understand. I have dared to ask too much?"

Her head drooped; she clasped her hands together, turned from him, and went back to her chair.

"That was dreadfully presumptuous, wasn't it?" and she looked up, smiling at him submissively, "to fancy for a moment that it might do you good to confide your secret discouragements—and hesitations—to a mere woman. But it was only a mouse that gnawed the net for the lion, wasn't it?" and she began to laugh.

And again he was troubled by the thought of her almost certain frailty. He had been on the point of telling her that he was a lion who had been set down on the programme to roar next Tuesday or Wednesday, that he wished to roar so loudly

that all the world would hear, and that he feared he might only be able to bleat in feeble lamblike impotence. But he checked himself, and vanquished this impulse. Safer, better, wiser not to give her one's confidence—far, far, wiser to keep her at arm's length. No confidence!

"That's right," he said. "Laugh at me,—don't take me seriously."

"I am not laughing at you."

"Then you ought to be—for boring you with such egotistical vaporings. But now I promise you I won't say another word about myself."

"Don't remind me of my presumption," and Irene's eyes flashed, and she laughed gaily. "You have humbled me quite enough for one evening."

They had a long, cheerful, gossiping talk, and Lord Brentwood thought no more of his quill pens and blank white note papers. He walked about the room; and Irene sat by the fire, submissively listening, submissively answering, being witty or grave, laughing and looking sad, exactly as my lord seemed to wish from moment to moment. The evening passed rapidly, and there was no confidence.

But the confidence came—next day or the day after. The hostess was getting better: not well enough yet, however, to move about the house, sit up for late dinner, or spend the evening downstairs. The host and the guest were necessarily thrown together; and they were on such extremely easy terms now, that if they talked at all, real thoughts could not long be held back.

Lord Brentwood let go his real thoughts about the leader of his Party, the coming battle, and his probable share in it; and immediately experienced a sense of comfort and selfish contentment at having released them. They talked about his position in the Party, and Irene was instantly on fire, burning with excitement.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said breathlessly. "I understand. You mean to assert yourself. Yes, do—it's time you did," and she emitted the most inspiriting advice.

She told him to take his own line for once. "Make yourself felt. Make them afraid of you. Choose some point of disagreement—and then without warning let fly at the Government itself. Turn on them and rend them, just when they rely on your support."

He explained that he could not very well do that. They did not do that sort of thing in the Lords. It was done in the Commons frequently—but the Commons were different, with their own traditions, ethics, and manners.

"Then pick a quarrel with the Opposition," cried Irene, vibrating with excitement, flashing and glowing in fiery enthusiasm. "Thunder at them—crush them. Denounce them—go for them hammer and tongs."

Ah—that was more possible. But again he explained that hammer and tongs oratory was exclusively an attribute of the Commons. They were quieter, more restrained, in his House. Nevertheless, something of denunciation he had intended to get ready for the coming week.

Then they talked about his speech and his notes.

"Do you really want me to tell you the sort of thing? Shall I read you my notes?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Shall I come with you?"

"No, I'll fetch them;" and he went into his room, and brought the notes to the library.

He read them nervously and diffidently, and looked at her expectantly for approval. Irene praised, and flashed, and glowed and vibrated. The notes were pretty enough—a poetical simile, some very happy turns, some phrases that would be remembered. But they were not quite strong enough for Irene.

"You *are* denouncing them. But they won't feel hot and cold while they listen. They won't wish themselves dead."

"You think it will sound tame?"

"No, no, no. But I'm sure you needn't be afraid of letting yourself out. Nothing *you* could say would be in bad taste—so don't think of all that. Put in a lot more. Make it claptrap even—to read well in the newspapers, supposing it doesn't go well in the Lords.—

"Let fly for once," pleaded Irene, with an excitement that communicated itself to him. "Make it strong. Show them what you are. I tell you, there's nobody like you on our side —and if they are such *fools* that they don't see it, you must force them."

After this the confidence was solidly established. But she talked, she could think of nothing beyond his speech and the great night of its delivery. And he wished to think of nothing else. He felt the warming comfort, the stimulating impetus of her sympathy. In this one matter, she might help him: she *did* really help him.

"When is it to be," she asked him again and again. "Not till next week! Tuesday or Wednesday. Oh, how long to wait."

It would be on Tuesday, he was soon able to tell her definitely. On Tuesday the Lords would cling to their red benches with noble disregard of soft beds at their disposal in lordly homes, would if necessary keep their lanterns shining till dawn turned them faint and pale, would perhaps go on debating till breakfast time.

"I am counting the days," she used to say. "Saturday, Sunday, Monday—Tuesday." Her excitement was always growing. It had found a vent, and it rolled forth and spread in nerve-shaking waves. "Tuesday! I shan't sleep that night. I shall be thinking of you."

About eleven o'clock one evening, as he sat in his room, he heard little taps at the inner of his double doors. When he opened it, she was standing on the threshold.

"I have been bored to tears," said Irene. "So I came back early. The stupidest man on earth sat by me at dinner—and a man I hate sat opposite."

"Really?" he said. "What bad luck!"

She wore a long opera cloak, and there was fur round her throat, and her neck seemed very white against the dark fur. He scarcely looked at her, or listened to her. His face was flushed and excited. He was altogether occupied by the pains and pleasures of authorship.

"Have you been working at your speech?"

"Yes—last touches. I—I think it's better—all right now. I shan't touch it again."

"Read it to me."

"Shall I?"

"Yes. How jealously you guard your door. Am I not to come in?"

"No—I'll bring it. Go back to the other end of the library—and I'll stand here and read it.—I want the distance."

Submissively she withdrew, and stationed herself at the far end of the big library, to represent rows of Opposition lords on remotest benches.

"Now. Do you hear me clearly? Does my voice sound strained—or natural, as if I was speaking to you close by?"

"It's all right. Go on."

And he read his notes—or a considerable portion of them,—and Irene, coming forward with radiant smiles, declared that they were splendid. Consciously or unconsciously, he had been guided by her advice. The oration was stronger now. The denunciation of opponents was almost violent—there were fiery scorn and biting gibes for the men who fought against principles to which they had all pledged themselves, who for petty partisan motives forsook their inborn sense of right and wrong, etc. etc.—there was even claptrap.

"Yes, that's better," said Irene rapturously. "A thousand times better. Now I *know* it will be grand. Now I *know* you can't fail."

"Then I shall leave it as it is," said Lord Brentwood. His hand shook with excitement, as he folded his notes and came towards her. "You do really think what you say?"

"I'm a million times too much interested and anxious—to say anything I didn't really think."

"Thank you. Yes—I believe now—that I shan't make a mess of it."

The day of battle had come. He was nervous, but self-possessed—self-absorbed rather. He showed himself inattentive, incapable of listening, in his last talk with Irene just before going down to the House. She asked him two or three

times if he knew exactly when he would speak, and he did not appear to hear her question. Then he said it would be after dinner, quite late, possibly. He was not sure.

"Then don't tire yourself. . . . Do please listen to me. You have six or seven hours before you, to get through. Take my advice—don't follow what is being said on either side. Just sit through the time—and go out whenever you can. Keep yourself fresh."

"Oh, that's all right, thanks. Thank you very much."

"And remember, you are *not* going to fail. . . . "

"Thanks."

"I shall be thinking of you every minute. I shan't sleep to-night. I feel as if I couldn't wait for the papers to-morrow morning. I know that I shan't sleep a wink to-night."

"Oh, yes—you'll sleep all right," he said, with a distrait smile. "But I must be off;" and he hurried away.

Lord Brentwood's laboriously prepared oration was very well delivered, and astonishingly well received. Every time he said "My lords, I must not weary you," there was a hearty salvo of "No, no," behind him; and, what was more gratifying, in front of him too. When he sat down, his pulse beat fast, he throbbed with satisfaction.—The thing was over, and he had made a real success.

He felt like a man in a happy dream, till the debate came to an end. All round him there was a pleasant buzz of compliment and congratulation. The front bench was praising him; back benches were murmuring praise; Opposition benches nodded and smiled, seemed as pleased as Punch to be denounced by him; the man now speaking had paused to bow and praise —"My lords, nothing that I could say would probably enhance the effect of the very able and eloquent arguments of the noble lord who has just addressed you. . . . "

He sat smiling and throbbing and thoroughly enjoying his modest triumph, till my Lords trooped out to hunt for cabs. They did not stay to cock-crow; the battle was concluded long before dawn, but the Commons had gone home to bed hours ago. All the way out, it was a triumphal progress for him.—

Everybody, friend or foe, praised him. It was impossible not to comprehend that all were pleased, because they all liked him personally. Very sweet to him was the praise of two or three men—gravely cordial approval from those really big men whose good opinion he had thought he could never really deserve.

He drove off in his cab, contented, comfortably proud, pleasurably excited, but not in the least vainglorious—his strongest feeling was gratitude to my lords for the generous hearing they had given, the kindly friendship they had exhibited.

He was thinking of their kindness still, as he dismissed the cab at the corner of the side street and walked beneath the great blank wall of his palace. He was wondering if the newspapers would do him justice, as he let himself into his palace by the little side door. He hoped, was almost sure, that the reporters had safely recorded the final applause before it was time to go to press. The compliments of speakers who followed him could not, however, have been in time for the morning editions.

He turned the light on and off in the lobby and the outer room, as he passed through them. From the middle room, he could see the firelight flickering bright on the ceiling of the inner room. The fire had been well kept up: the flames were leaping and dancing. He went across to his writing table, to turn on the light of the shaded lamp; laid down his portfolio, and uttered a startled exclamation. A figure had risen from the couch by the fireside.

"Hush. It is I—Irene. I have been waiting for you."

"What is it?" and he stared at her wonderingly. "Is Gladys worse?"

"No. Tell me all that has happened. I have been waiting for hours."

She was glorious in the firelight. The leaping flame showed him her loose, clinging robe of red brocade with gold upon it that caught the light and glittered, her bare arms hanging from the wide sleeves, her white throat gleaming, her hair coiled loose and tumbling about her ears, and her eyes burn-

ing and flashing. She looked like a sorceress—a splendid wicked magician weaving her necromantic spells in the silence of night when all the world was at rest.

"No," she said defiantly. "Gladys is asleep. Gladys doesn't care. . . . Everybody in the house is asleep—except me. . . . *I* couldn't sleep," she went on breathlessly. "I tried to—because you told me. I did go to bed, but I couldn't sleep—thinking of *you*. So I flung this on, and came down to wait for you. . . . I have been waiting for you—for hours."

XXXIV

MISS MALCOMSON did not go to Mentone. At the conclusion of her visit in Mayfair she returned to Bayswater, braved her angry father, pooh-poohed him, disobeyed him, and flatly refused to leave London. Mamma had a maid and a nurse with her: she could not require anyone else. It would be time for Mamma to come home directly—and Papa might go and fetch her.

Really it was rather absurd to suppose that Miss Malcomson would consent to sacrifice her natural inclinations—she never had done so. Her social engagements were increasing, her fame was growing, the beautiful Miss Malcomson's circle of smart friends was every day larger. Her dresses were described in fashionable prints; when she appeared in public, many eyes watched her. If she was seen at the theatre marshalling her guests to their seats, half the people in the stalls knew her by sight and watched her curiously. "Good gracious, what a big party! Do they all belong to Miss Malcomson? . . . Who has she got? That's Lady Edward Hernshaw—I don't think much of *her*. And there's Reggie Papworth. It is Reggie, isn't it? Oh, my dear—look! The Duke of Newport! And Vi Reynolds!" And where is the one that we watchers and whisperers all expect to see? "Here he comes—I thought so. Lord Brentwood—of course!"

Miss Malcomson's dresses were worthy of study and descrip-

tion. Clever Antoinette of Albermarle Street was taxing her inventive art. Antoinette had a new dress for Miss Malcomson to wear, every time that Miss Malcomson gave a dinner-party or a theatre party. Either old Malcomson's money was being spent, or his credit was being pledged, with an unparalleled freedom. Miss Malcomson's hospitality at the Darmstadt made people gape more than ever—the biggest round tables, buried beneath mountains of unseasonable flowers, a dozen guests thrice in a week.—Millionaires, aware of Darmstadt's fiendish charges, are amazed. It is more than they can do themselves.

"Who has she got to-night?" Darmstadt society is staring and whispering, and grinning. "Lord Brentwood! Well, that *is* a surprise. But who else? . . . Oh, my dear, do look at her dress. . . . Isn't it daring? But, oh, I do think it is lovely—but so daring. It suits *her* all right—but would you dare? I wouldn't."

Miss Malcomson, greatly daring, is red to-night—bright fiery red. At a distance, she seems really to be clothed in red flame. The color goes well with her lips and hair;—and there is red upon her neck too—some new ornament that looks like a diamond dog collar with great blood stains upon it. Rubies—oh, what big rubies! Has she ever worn those before? They are sham, of course. "Oh yes, they're sham. Why, my dear, they *couldn't* be real. Think what real ones—of that size—would cost."

Thus Miss Malcomson's fame waxes; thus, with many eyes watching, many tongues whispering, her position as a minor social celebrity strengthens itself day by day.

Meanwhile, Gladys Brentwood slowly recovered from the ill effects of the cold; and, as a convalescent, was abandoned to her own resources by Dr. Prescott and by almost everybody else in the world. She might drive again now, but she must use a closed carriage. That was Dr. Prescott's last word of advice. For the rest, she should exercise discretion, keep up her spirits, be brisk and jolly and gay as much as possible, avoid solitude, depression, and all morbid thoughts—take care of herself, and not trouble others to take care of her.

But she could not contend against the sadness of her thoughts. Everything depressed her; nothing happened to cheer her.

Kind old Lady Emily came often during her convalescence, and affectionately endeavored to inspire cheerfulness. Lady Emily had hoped that the indisposition of her sister-in-law might indicate the prospect of an addition to the family before very long, and she was disappointed by discovering that any such expectation was groundless. Another discovery grieved her. Gladys very plainly was being neglected by her husband. Often as Lady Emily came to call, she never by any chance saw Lord Brentwood. She determined to talk to Seymour very seriously. This drifting apart was a dreadful phase of married life, as practised in these degenerate days.

"You and Seymour should go holiday-making again," said Lady Emily. "You must get him to take you away at Easter. I am sure you want change of air, and change of scene.

"He has not spoken of going away," said Gladys, in a tone of dull indifference. "I don't think he intends to go."

"Oh, you should persuade him to have a holiday."

"I can't do that," said Gladys in the same dull voice. "I can't interfere with his career."

"Ah, no. But he must not give up everything—even to politics." And Lady Emily, still striving to cheer, spoke of her brother's recent successes. "Is it not delightful to read how the newspapers praise him? Wherever I go, I hear him praised—much more than last year. He is doing so well."

Gladys echoed Lady Emily's words.

"Yes, he is doing well."

"People who really know—who are in the inner ring—tell me that they all think more highly of him this session than they ever did. They say he is going steadily forward."

"Yes—he is going forward."

Lady Emily thought that these dull-toned echoes sounded as inappropriate as they were unenthusiastic, and she looked at her sister-in-law searchingly.

"But of course he should not sacrifice too much to—to—his parliamentary work," and Lady Emily seemed to be apologizing for her brother's absence. "I would have liked

to see him here with you to-day. But then he *is* so busy—*I* never never see him. And no doubt you are deprived of his company more often than you would naturally wish. But, as I say, we must all take the greatest pride in his success."

"His career is everything," said Gladys dully. "Nothing else matters."

Lady Emily thought the monotonous tone of voice very queer. She looked at Gladys more searchingly than before, and she began to ask some very direct questions.

"Gladys dear, you say that, almost as if you did not really mean it. But you do mean it?"

"Oh, yes—I mean it. What else could I mean?"

Lady Emily, on this and other occasions, offered herself as chaperon or companion whenever Gladys wanted somebody to go about with.

"If you feel lonely, dear—and I am afraid that is what you do feel sometimes—let me join you. I would always be glad. I would go anywhere;" and Lady Emily assumed a great sprightliness of manner. "I would be game for anything—as they say nowadays. I don't like the idea of your going about so much alone, or with any escort except your husband—and I hate the idea of your sitting moped at home because Seymour is too busy to escort you."

"You are very good," said Gladys. "But I am accustomed to being alone—I was often alone before I married."

"Yes, but let us have some little treats together," said Emily persistently. "You are fond of the play—and I should love to do a play or two with you. Just tell me which play you would care to see—to-night. Yes, dear, to-night—if you are free. Come and dine with me at seven o'clock, and we will go to the theatre and thoroughly amuse ourselves."

Lady Brentwood excused herself; and, when pressed to enjoy the gaieties and humors of a new musical comedy, said that it would make her cry rather than laugh: it would bore her to death.

"Oh, very well," said Lady Emily. "Then I will not urge it. . . . But come out with me this afternoon. Let us go shopping. That is always amusing."

Gladys begged to be excused. It was sweet of Emily to offer her society; but she did not feel in spirits for any amusement. She confessed that she was still rather weak, nervous and shaky; and, if Emily must know more, she was at the present time much worried by private troubles.

"Private! Then I must not ask you what they are—but, Gladys dear, if you would tell me what they are?"

Well, the troubles principally concerned her brother Schiller. She confessed to Emily that she suffered great anxiety about her brother. He was always getting into trouble.

Lady Emily, as if suddenly relieved in mind, spoke very kindly of Mr. Schiller. Young men would be troublesome, but really *their* troubles were of little moment: they got into them so quickly, and they always got out of them somehow. Again, theirs were troubles in regard to which money was a potent extricating force.

"Money difficulties! Don't let that sort of trouble distress you," said Lady Emily, with the utmost cheerfulness. "Fortunately, you and Seymour are so rich—tell Seymour all about it. Seymour is the person to whom you should tell everything. He will drive away such cares in a moment. Seymour will pull your poor brother out of the deepest hole."

"Seymour has his career to attend to," said Lady Brentwood again; and again the flat, dull tone came into her voice. "I must not trouble him."

"No—tell him everything. It is his duty to take all your troubles on his shoulders. It is your duty, dear, to let him take them."

Lady Emily went away oppressed by a very uncomfortable conviction that things were going very badly at Andover House, that Seymour and Gladys had drifted very far apart, and that Seymour was very much to blame. If plain speaking could bring him to see the error of his ways, he should soon hear some of the plainest from his affectionate but indignant old sister.

Gladys did not bother Lord Brentwood with any of her private anxieties. She kept nearly all her sad thoughts to

herself, and night and day felt their increasing weight. But such part of her sadness as was caused by a dissipated spendthrift brother she spoke of freely to the person who was now perhaps her only friend. This was her brother's friend, Harold Ingram. She respected this gentleman; she admired him for his quiet strength of character, his loyalty, and his truth; and she turned to him naturally for help.

Schiller had drawn no more bills upon his father, but he had drawn several upon his sister. The first time that this occurred, Gladys was terrified. She remembered Mr. Copland's indignation, and his statement that, to save his son from dishonor, he had been compelled to pay. In her ignorance of all business matters, she believed that Schiller, by the unauthorized liberties he took with other people's names, was guilty of something far worse than impertinence. She thought he had put himself in peril—that perhaps the law might hold him to account, for committing what was equivalent to forgery. She carried the compromising document to Harold Ingram, and implored him to assist her in shielding the unhappy Schiller from the consequences of his wickedly foolish act.

"What am I to say—what am I to do?" she asked. "Of course I will find the money—but how am I to save him? My father saved him once—but I don't know how. Shall I tell them that I wrote it myself? Must I swear that I wrote my name—and not Schiller."

Mr. Ingram was able to assure her that, in providing the money, she would relieve her brother from all annoyance; and he further explained that the only danger run by Schiller was the possible necessity of providing the money himself. He was very angry with Schiller for terrifying a generous and loving sister.

Schiller promised to draw no more bills; and, unhappily, Schiller broke his word. He drew, and drew—would go on drawing, as long as Lady Brentwood would go on paying. Alas, the pleasures of the town were too seductive for Schiller: he surrendered himself to them now without a struggle. He was fast going to the bad, if he had not quite reached the goal. He drank, he gambled, he was a prey to the lowest of

low associates. Wiser had it been to leave Schiller in the backwoods, by rushing torrents, among cut-throat miners or prowling, scalping Indians. Schiller would have been safer there than in our darkly labyrinthine London.

This sadly depressing view of an almost lost brother was given to her by sympathetic Harold Ingram. How can we redeem and save our Schiller? Often they talked of it. Schiller could not be saved by her—he spoke of his iniquities with cynical shamelessness. "I know I have been behaving like a rotter and a wrong 'un—but don't you fret, little Gladdie. You've been a trump in stumping up for me again—but if you can't pay, don't fret over it. . . . If the worst comes to the worst, I can always go over one of the bridges."

He terrified her by these sinister threats; and she was appalled by the swift deterioration of his appearance. He was thin and yet bloated, his eyes were haggard and bloodshot: he was a dreadful, shabby, swaggering rake, smiling at her with a smile that rent her heart. In this ugly ghost she could still see her childhood's playmate.

How is he to be saved? Only loyal brave Ingram can save him. She leaned on him more and more; with tears, she prayed him to rescue her poor wastrel. A life for a life, Mr. Ingram, or a soul for a body. He saved you once. Now pay your debt, and save *him*. This, in effect, was her prayer. Schiller must be snatched away from degradation and destruction; he must be taken back to honest open air toil in a wild far-off land; he must be watched and guarded by a staunch strong comrade, till he regained courage and strength to resist bestial temptation. You are so strong, Mr. Ingram, that we lean upon you heavily and yet confidently. *You* will not fail us. All that we have thought was solid and firm has yielded and proved false. You alone are a support that does not bend or break.

"You want me to take him back to Canada—and stay with him there?"

"Yes—if you will do that, it will be the noblest kindest thing that a friend ever did."

"But, after all, is banishment really necessary?"

"You said yourself it is his only chance."

"Did I? But then—I did not know that I was to be banished with him."

"We *must* get him out of London."

"He is certainly doing no good in London," said Ingram gloomily. "But he is not the only person of whom that can be remarked. Myself too! Perhaps banishment is the cure for both of us—Yet it is not exactly an inviting programme."

Gladys took his hand in hers, and pressed it while she looked at his doubtful, gloomy face. Our duty is often hard to us. But a debt is a debt; friendship demands immolation of self; we lean on you, Mr. Ingram, in this our need.

"Lady Brentwood—you ask me—for your sake—to give up a great deal."

Then, suddenly, that which she leaned on bent and almost broke.

"Gladys—come with us;" and abruptly and fiercely he began to make love to her.

She pleaded with him to stop; but he made her hear his ugly declarations. He burst into abuse of her husband, and protests did not silence him. She implored him not to make their friendship impossible. She told him how she had valued his friendship, and prayed him not to rob her of it altogether.

"Gladys, it is what it will come to in the end. Don't go on wasting your love—and your life. Don't be afraid of hard facts—face the future now. If not I, it will be someone else. Leave this fool—this self-centred prig—this brainless dummy of a man. Cut yourself free from him—and live your own life. Of course you know I worship you—women always know—you know it—yes, you do know it. Come away with us. Let him divorce you—we'll be married out there—and we need never come back. Your brother won't blame you—we'll devote ourselves to him—he'll join our hands and bless us."

At last the ugly appeal was done. At last Mr. Ingram understood that he had disgraced himself to no purpose, that he had achieved nothing more than the infliction of pain on a lady who honored him with a genuine regard. He knew now that her kind, sad eyes were full of sorrowful regret, because

he had attempted something ignoble when she had asked from him something great and good.

She looked at him as she might have looked at some clumsy companion who, blundering and tripping, had rolled in the mud at her feet. Her pitying wish was that he would get up and clean himself as quickly as possible. If that story of his life was true, and he had been already disappointed in love, then one might say that Mr. Ingram, despite of his reputation, was unlucky in love. For there was only disappointment for him here.

He bore his misfortune with the best grace he could command. He begged Lady Brentwood's pardon, requested her to forget his mistake, and vowed that he would never offend again.

"I am sorry. That is all I can say. But don't, please, fear me.—Trust me to do my best for Schiller."

She was to rely on him as hitherto. He would not fail her.

But he spoke very gloomily of the difficulties of his task. It was easier to pass a sentence of exile upon Mr. Schiller than it was to carry the sentence into effect. Very doubtful if our Schiller will submit to transportation. Still, we will see what we can do. We will prove our loyalty and staunchness—and, thus, handsomely obliterate the very unfortunate impression created by hasty, ill-considered words.

"Say you have forgiven me, Lady Brentwood. Say you will still rely on me—and let our friendship continue, though I must hope for nothing more."

She told him that she still relied on his fidelity, that she would never think of his offence. But she thought of it very often, and grew sadder than before. The loss of this friendship—for truly it had been lost—was bitter and grievous. Another loss, another blank void. All was going from her; more and more completely she stood alone.

As she was starting for her drive one afternoon, a strange fancy seized her. She went straight to her father's shop, and asked Mr. Copland if he could give her the address of his sometime partner, Mrs. Pascall.

"My dear girl," said Mr. Copland, greatly taken aback by the request. "Why on earth do you wish for the address of that insignificant personage?"

"I fancy that I should like to see her."

Mr. Copland said it was a very strange fancy—one that he really could not understand. "And my dear, I doubt if I can give you the address."

"Father, surely you know where the poor soul is living," and his daughter looked at him reproachfully. "Surely you have satisfied yourself that she is provided for, comfortable, and——"

"Oh, certainly, yes," said Mr. Copland hurriedly. "I understand your kind thought, now. But that is all right. She was a woman of considerable means—for a person in her position. And, you know, I repaid every penny she put into that old business. She took out her capital intact—quite intact, my pet."

"When did you last hear of her, Papa?"

"Oh, not long ago—about a year, I think."

"Then can you give me the address from which she last wrote?"

Mr. Copland coughed and opened his hands, and deprecatingly advised Lady Brentwood not to indulge the strange fancy any further.

"My dear, think of her position, and of yours.—She may be quick to take advantage of your good nature. You may lay yourself open to future annoyance."

"Father, I feel that I must see her. A year is a long time —much can happen in a year. I want to be sure that she is not lying abandoned, in sickness and poverty."

"Oh, as to that—well, let me be your channel of communication."

"No," she said resolutely. "I want to see her myself, before I sleep to-night."

Mr. Copland said he would search his private address book, and he looked round in embarrassment. Slim and trim Miss Vincent had come to the glass door of the office.

"I will examine what memoranda I have in my pigeon-

holes—since you insist;" and he dropped his voice to a whisper. "Perhaps, my love, you will kindly say 'How-do-you-do' to Miss Vincent—and engage her in some slight conversation. She is just a wee bit inquisitive—and, ah, there is such a thing as jealousy. With faithful temperaments, you have always to be prepared for jealousy.",

Lady Brentwood bowed to the faithful secretary, and talked to her as bidden. And Mr. Copland soon returned with a neatly folded memorandum.

"There, my dear, is the last address of—our old housekeeper," and he conducted his daughter towards the shop door. "Mr. Goring! The Countess of Brentwood's carriage. . . . I find—ah—that it is longer ago than I thought. Rather more than two years. . . . Goodbye, my dear."

Gladys drove to Clapham Junction, round and about a dull wilderness of sordid streets near the railway station; and at last reached the mean little house where lived blowzy forsaken Mrs. Pascall.

"*Gladys!* Well, I never. This *is* a surprise. Who'd have thought of it being you. The landlady said a splendid carriage. But it never came into my head."

She was very little altered—a little grayer, redder, fatter, more untidy.

"Gladys, whatever has made you come? But I mustn't call you Gladys—I did in the old days, but now that you are——"

"No, call me by the old name."

"Ah, you were always a kind heart, Gladys. Sit down, dear,—and have a cup o' tea."

The carriage was sent away, for the horses to repose themselves at the nearest livery yard, and Lady Brentwood stayed for a long time with this humble acquaintance of the past. After tea they sat side by side on a shabby, springless sofa, and talked of the past. Mrs. Pascall, going backward further and further into bygone times, told her sympathetic visitor all that the dead years had ever given her.

"How you have made me talk, Gladys—but, lor, how it has done me good!"

First, she had been badly treated by a lover, to whom she had made the supreme sacrifice; then she had been badly treated by a husband; then she had been badly treated by Copland. "Mine has been a sad life. But it's true I have not been a good woman, Gladys. No harm in saying so, now you're a happy married matron—able to understand.

"There was my mistake—that's what I've had to be punished for. . . .

"The men are all the same—except you bind them by book and ring. They so soon tire of us. *My* husband tired of me—but he couldn't break loose from me, because he was my husband. I wish he had, for he was a cruel bad man. But what I mean to say, Gladys, is this—Beauty's nothing—That won't hold them.—I had my good looks in the beginning. . . . I thought your father would hold to me. He promised. But your father, Gladys—well, he is your father. I won't say anything against him. He was free to cut me adrift again, and he did it. . . .

" . . . Yes, I have means. And I am comfortable enough—as comfortable as any woman can be who has passed her fiftieth birthday quite alone—without children, husband, or friends. . . .

" . . . Thank you for coming, Gladys. You've done me real good. But I do wonder whatever put it into your head to come, after all this time."

And Gladys perplexed Mrs. Pascall by saying that a purely selfish motive had brought her to Clapham.

"You mustn't thank me for coming. I, too, am lonely," she said. "And all has gone from me.—So I felt a selfish longing to be reminded of my youth—just to see a familiar face. . . . Everyone who loved me is gone."

"But, Gladys," said Mrs. Pascall, in perplexity, "you have your loving husband still."

"Oh, yes," said Gladys, with a hard, cold voice. "I have my husband—bound to me by ring and book. I shall always have my husband. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder—I mustn't forget that."

She offered Mrs. Pascall money, should it ever be required;

she begged Mrs. Pascall to write to her sometimes; and she asked to be allowed to come and see Mrs. Pascall again. When leaving, she threw her arms round the large waist, kissed the red face,—clung to Mrs. Pascall, and sobbed on her broad bosom.

"You said I was kind to you, dear Mrs. Pascall, in the old days. But that's not true. I was unkind to you—because I was happy. I didn't know it, but I was happy then."

Mrs. Pascall seemed mightily perplexed by this queer apology and parting speech.

Gladys drove home; and through the evening, and on into the night, fear was her companion. She sat all alone, sobbing and shivering in her grand home, telling herself that she was the most unhappy woman in cottage or palace to-night.

She was afraid of the ugliness of life. All the world was falling into ruin, into corruption and decay. Ugliness and sin lurked in the shadows, surrounded her, would show themselves wherever she dared look. Her father was old in wickedness; her brother was more wicked every day; the man she trusted as a friend had turned wicked. Her home was the tomb of all her hopes.

She was afraid of Andover House—its bigness, its mystery, its age: a stone fortress that does not change, though garrisons come and go; a dark prison whose walls stand unshaken, though prisoners' hearts beat slow, beat fast, or break. She was afraid of the corridor where the grim old lord died, afraid of the rooms where the wailing voice of a child had sounded and ceased, afraid of those rooms where her husband hid himself for long hours, symbolizing their disunion by setting locked doors between him and her. She was afraid of the unplumbed horror of death, and of the inconceivable ugliness of life.

She wept and shivered and prayed, fighting her sadness and her fear. She was trying to form brave resolutions, trying to shape something solid from ruin, wreck, and chaos—trying to map a definite course for a hopeless future, and praying that she might have strength to follow the mapped course.

XXXV

IT was dusk of an April day, and Seymour was alone in his room with the marble busts of great impeccable statesmen. Logs smouldered on the hearth, the curtains had been drawn, and he stood in the shadow by his desk, waiting and listening. The doors of the middle and the outer room were open, but all doors that led to the other part of the house were close shut, close locked. No one must disturb my lord. He has vanished from vulgar, prying eyes—my lord is perhaps immersed in noble ruminating toil for a nation's good. Let no one molest him. . . . Not a sound from the house—the rooms built by Marlow the pander were working well, were justifying the previsions of their inventor.

Presently, a faint sound in the lobby—faintest jar of door against jamb, or echo from stone stairs;—but he has heard it. Faint rustle of skirts, or tap of a heel—the sound for which his ear has been straining in the silence. She has come, and he goes to meet her.

Is this what Marlow, eager to serve a patron, saw in prophetic vision:—a shadow flitting beneath the blank outer wall; a sombrely-draped ghost at the secret entrance,—passing through the solid masonry, moving again through the gloom of an ante-chamber;—a quick-breathing figure in veil and fur, assuming more life as veils rise and wraps fall, changing into a snakish creature of sensuous lure and base potency—to clasp my lord in her arms, glue her lips to his, and set him on fire?

If so, my lord has been well served: for this is what is happening now.

"Are you sure you weren't seen?"

"Yes—quite sure."

"You mustn't come at this hour again. It is lighter every day. It's not dark enough till eight o'clock, or even later. You mustn't come again."

"My prince, I must come to you when I can. In any hour,—in every hour."

"No—I tell you—it is not safe. I—I have been thinking what we can do. I can't risk your being seen."

"You have given me the key to heaven—and I must use it." She held up the little key of the secret entrance, and laughed softly. "When we fallen angels find our way back to heaven, we are difficult people to keep out. . . . Do you hear, my prince?"

The shadows deepened; the fire-glow flickered on the ceiling; the flames flashed bright, leaped and danced, faded and sank. Darkness filled the narrow street outside the curtained window, seemed to rise about the stone walls like the night tide against a fortress in the sea—with silently swelling waves of darkness, engulfed and concealed the house and its shame. She might leave him now.

The electric light dazzled their eyes, made them blink and stare, as the switches clicked; and again the room showed itself, severely formal, rigidly correct, with no ornament but the marble brows and cold lips of those lofty, steadfast men in whose footsteps he had dreamed that he could one day follow.

"You are tired of me? You want me to go."

He put the long cloak round her shoulders, wrapped her in the fur scarf, helped her carefully to pin the veil.

"When shall I come to you again?"

"Irene—listen. It isn't safe. Servants will suspect—and watch for you. Think what we risk."

"When shall I use my key again?"

"Never—I tell you. Really, you must——"

"Do you want to take the key from me?"

"Yes, you had better give it back to me now——"

"I can't. It is mine. You have bolts and bars, to keep me out. Employ them against me. See if your fallen angel can smash the gate of paradise. . . . Tell me when I may come."

"If—if we risk it once more, it must be for the last time."

"When shall we risk it—to-morrow evening? It won't be easy for me—but I'll arrange it."

"No—certainly not to-morrow."

"When?"

"I—yes, I'll write and let you know. You are sure that woman—Miss—what d'you call her—Cole is safe?"

"Yes."

"You can trust her not to tamper with your letters? . . . Very well, I'll write to you there."

A draped figure standing for a moment in a dark entry, a dusky ghost moving fast, taking form and growing vague as it passes the light of a street lamp,—and she is gone from the dishonored home. Marlow's rooms have worked well. Marlow's doors shut smoothly, his walls are discreetly mute, his marble lips tell no tales.

XXXVI

SEYMOUR had broken the marriage vow; he was false to his wife; he hated himself for his infidelity—and continued to be unfaithful.

It was not an infatuation, but a horrible subjection. He felt his slavery, yet could not emancipate himself. He was like a nerve-weary invalid who has fallen into a degrading, self-destructive habit, who measures the depth of the danger, and still yields to temptation and slides lower day by day. He swears that he will break the habit; but the ugly vice goes on—the laudanum in the vase invites him, the chloral tablets lie hidden in a drawer, the hypodermic needle it ready to his hand. Once again—but this must be the very last time.

The intrigue continued. They met by stealth, now here, now there, snatching brief interviews whenever opportunity offered. In public they were often seen together; among crowds they whispered appointments for their secret unseen whisperings. Often he cursed his weakness and folly; but still the intrigue went on.

"You are not to reproach yourself," she told him. "All the blame is mine—and I glory in it. You are not to mind what happens to me."

She said this sort of thing, in varied words, with a dreadfully fatiguing reiteration.

"I meant it all along—The fault is mine, not yours."

She told him that she had loved him at first sight, that the love at second and third sights had developed force, that ever after it had augmented—until she was devoured by love for him. And he was not gratified, lulled, or soothed by her protestations. He did not believe or disbelieve them; he did not care: he knew her now for what she really was.

"I am sorry for Gladys," she would say. "I was always enormously fond of Gladys, and I am sorry—But we can't think of that now. It was inevitable—the law of matter—atoms that draw, and atoms that drive—you know what the chemists call molecular affinities. And isn't the struggle for love like the struggle for life? I read a book by a Frenchman, the other day, who goes straighter to the essence of mutual attraction than any of our fossilized, convention-bound psychologists. He typifies us as flames—That's as old as the hills of course. . . . But never mind—your flame and mine were predestined to meet and fuse. . . . "

And he had thought her erudite and clever—while she listened submissively and let him talk. Now, intimacy had unbridled her glib tongue; again she rolled out her windy extemporized nonsense—filling him with wonder, regret, disgust.

"Gladys couldn't understand you. . . . Now, don't frown at me, my prince of darkness and light. You don't like me to speak of her. Very well—let's forget her. But Gladys was never worthy of you. . . .

"No woman *can* deserve you. I am an episode. It is all I dared ask." And she flattered him, would not stop flattering. "Yes, I *will* tell you—you shall know your strength. No woman could resist you—because you are irresistible. Once in a hundred years, a man is given empire over all the women alive—he may not know it himself—and that makes his dominion the more complete—And Seymour Charlton is the man of *our* hundred years. Don't shrug your shoulders. It is so. I knew it directly I saw you, and I thought—if I was a

very very good and proper and really nicely behaved person, I had better keep out of your way. . . . And I believe all the straight-laced, immaculate grand ladies who go to the parties at Andover House have felt just the same—at least once. . . . Do you want to know if I was frightened by the thought? I won't tell you that. You must judge me by subsequent events."

He could judge her now. Her flattery turned him sick. Brooding over the shameless praise with which she bedaubed and nauseated him, he summoned to his mental view the women who might have held her secret place in his life. So many had tempted him, and he had been able to disregard the temptation. He had never considered himself an invincible conqueror of hearts. When he was poor, he had been often loved by women, and often ignored by them; but, since his marriage, he knew that women had tacitly offered themselves to him, were prepared, in the cant phrase, to throw themselves at his head. Among these were the professional sirens, the post-card actresses, the society women who had long forfeited reputation and respect, but who are not disgraced, because powerful friends and relations still countenance and sustain them. Well, if he was fatally doomed sooner or later to break the marriage bond, it would have been better to choose one of these. But, as she boasted, he had made no choice: he had been chosen. And he thought, with self contempt, that of all women on earth, it should not have been this woman. His wife's friend,—the worst of all treachery,—the guest under the wife's roof.—It is the most vulgar sin that a man can commit. Again he swore to himself that he would be done with it.

Weeks passed, months passed, but his thraldom continued. An episode—yes, but she would not allow him to close it. Sometimes he fancied that he would soon be free: she herself was relaxing his fetters; her insatiable desire for some new excitement would bring about his release. Once he believed that freedom had come. But she drew him back to her; and gradually he ceased to struggle against the habit, abandoned even the attempt to deceive himself with good intentions.

One after another, her spells lost efficacy, until power was retained only by the basest of them; and yet these controlled him. He understood her, he despised her; and yet, when she pleased to exert the old efforts, he was still fascinated by her. The subtle surface charms had faded; the inward mystery was gone. There had been no mystery. Beneath the glamor and the wicked seductive grace, there was nothing. She was essentially common—he recognized the coarsest and most stereotyped pattern of mind, a clumsy swift-moving mechanism, incapable of thought-production, merely revolving and pouring out the thoughts hastily crammed into it.

"Don't look ahead."—This was repeated a hundred different times. "My philosophy has always been, never to look ahead. Take all you can from life. Whenever people came to me with their feeble doubts and silly fears, I told them that. Don't wait, snatch from life all it has to give you now. It is so short—I mean life—life that is worth living. Just a few years, and it will be all over with *me*. Thirty-five—finis—ring down the green curtain. You shake your head, but you know my philosophy is sound. If you and I had met ten years hence, instead of now, I could never have got you to care for me."

Her philosophy produced slight headache; her advice made him feel as if he was in some dreadful underground lecture-hall, out of which air was being pumped. It was the same advice always: the vulgar, stimulating exhortation of confident ignorance. But he had listened to it once with pleasure!

"Remember what I told you about your speeches—and you must own that it brought you success. You won't fail, if you make up your mind that you *will* succeed. That's a thing that I can't help admiring in your friend Sir Gregory Stuart. I hate him for other things—I'll tell you things about him some day. Be on your guard with that man. Don't trust him too far. Don't trust Lionel Malcomson Esquire either—But that man, Stuart, succeeds in all he attempts—He says so himself—he won't consent to fail. Well, be like him in that, my king—only in that. For he is a pig—not fit to sweep the carpet on which my king walks. . . .

"You are not ambitious enough. He aims too low who aims beneath the stars. You should have the highest aspirations—and make sure of achievement. Remember what I said. Go on with your noble dreams, but turn some of them into facts."

There was bitter irony in the reflection that she must thus continually remind him of how great had been his fall from dreams to facts.

"All you want is bucking up—You hate my slang, don't you? I won't be slangy. I'll be all that my king desires—his servant, his guide, his true friend. That's what I meant by friendship.—I am the great king's favorite, the solace of his dark hours, the secret joy of his innermost court; but I want to be the shadow behind the throne, when he sits in state and rules the world. Trust me—never keep anything back from me. I can help you more and more—I will tear away doubt, and strangle hesitation. I mean to make you all that you ought to be—If you'll only take heart."

And then, working herself into excitement, she would clasp her hands above her head, pace to and fro, and give him the sort of emotional eloquence proper to the bad lady in a historical melodrama.

"O Seymour—why is it all too late? Why does destiny play such pranks with us poor human puppets? If we were meant to meet, why were we set in this maze of life—to pass and repass,—within hand's grasp of each other, and yet not know it. Why didn't you find me sooner? Suppose you had come to me when I was young—and different. I would have been the same to you in my love. I might have been queen then—instead of what I am. Oh, I daren't think of it—Feel my forehead—do you feel the blood beating? That's just the burning thought of what I might have been to you. Together, facing the world,—you and I!"

After one of these tirades, his headache and his exhaustion were considerable. Moreover, her repetitive complaints of destiny's past mismanagement produced in him uneasy dread of the future. She harped on this string so often now. Was she hinting that the future might bring in due course an open

rupture with his wife, a public scandal, and finally divorce,—and that, then, destiny's oversights could be repaired?

He thought of it as a very real peril; and, thinking of it, his dread increased. She was so reckless. She might force a scandal through folly or wilfulness. He remembered her speaking of the heroine of a recent *cause célebre,* and expressing amused approval of this bold lady's methods—"She intended to be found out." And another time, "Oh, I know Lady Dolly made up her mind to kick over the traces, and fairly upset the applecart. She would never have been bowled out of she hadn't wanted to see the stumps fly. Miss Cole told me all about it—You know, she is a cousin of Lady Dolly, and stood by her through thick and thin. . . . " Irene might upset his applecart, simply to assuage her morbid craving for excitement. She said she did not care what happened to her. Suppose she did not care what happened to him.

Nothing could curb her recklessness. He had given her jewels, on the condition that she would not wear them until by some artful device she could account for their possession. But she publicly displayed them at once: showed them to the world, and only concealed them from her parents.

"That's all right," she said glibly—"No one shall guess their value, or the price you paid for them.—I suppose it would better become me to say the price *I* have paid for them." She disregarded his admonitions, she disobeyed his commands. She who offered so much advice never would accept any. He told her not to come to Andover House, secretly to see him, or openly to see his wife; and she did both. He dreaded every meeting between her and his wife. He feared that some unguarded word, some ill-considered lie, or over-acting of a truth would betray their secret. The mere presence of Irene might arouse an instinct of suspicion. Looking at her shiftily flashing eyes, Gladys might read the secret.

"What an absurd idea," said Irene. "Staying away and never going to see her would be just the one thing to make her suspicious. I promise you I don't want to go too often—poor Gladys isn't a very lively companion. But I must keep up appearances, and treat her exactly as before."—

Most of all, he despised himself when compelled to speak thus of his wife. But perhaps, in this regard, the fears under which he suffered were less selfish than when he thought of anything else.

"You are certain that she has no suspicion?"

"Of course I am," said Irene. "Why should she suspect? I've always done Gladys that justice—she has a remarkably trustful disposition—and is utterly ignorant of human nature."

"You say her manner is just the same to you?"

"Oh, yes—I haven't noticed any difference."

"You say that doubtfully now. A minute ago you said you were certain there was no difference."

"So I am—But you ask so many questions. I tell you, nobody suspects. Don't worry—don't look ahead, and make trouble before it comes."

"No, that won't do." And Irene was perhaps surprised by the unwonted stubbornness of his voice. "If I ask many questions, you must be good enough to answer them. I am asking you about my wife now—and about no one else. Has there been anything in her manner—the slightest change—to make you doubt if she still considers you her friend—as in the old days?"

"No—nothing."

"Nothing has occurred to make you think that she *does* perhaps suspect?"

"No—my prince. No."

"You swear that is true, on your honor?"

"Oh, my prince, what a strange oath to administer to your trembling servant—Don't frown at me. There, I swear—on my honor."

No one suspected them. Irene assured him, again and again, that their secret was safe. He need have no qualms. Papa and Mamma would never by any possibility suspect—he might dismiss them altogether from his mind.

But he could not banish the vague dread that haunted him. Clearly he began to understand the deteriorating mental effects slowly produced by constant deception. He felt that his

intellectual power was being steadily sapped, his courage was diminishing, his nerves were relaxing. More than ever he was a man acting a part, and not living his life. Intercourse with other men was poisoned. He was always thinking of himself and wondering what other men thought of him. Sleeping and waking, he was alike worried and restless; at work or at play, he was self-absorbed, unable to forget himself. Sitting in the Lords, or presiding at his board-meetings, he felt sometimes so completely lost to external impressions that he fancied himself in another scene, surrounded by other faces, saying other words than those which he heard his own voice now saying. Yet he acted his part without blunders.

He shook hands with old Malcomson and his co-directors, instructed Mr. Waller to take the minutes of their last meeting as read; or went into the Government lobby, voted, nodded and smiled at the teller and his wand, came back to the front bench—showed himself as the dignified, reserved, and yet good-natured Lord Brentwood, performing with estimable, if automatic, propriety.

Often his thoughts were purely selfish. As when, forgetting Gladys altogether, he brooded upon the utter shipwreck to his career that would be caused by a disclosure of the intrigue. A scandal of this nature would ruin him politically. To the public at large, his enslaver would appear as the young innocent maiden whose innocence had been betrayed by a profligate married man. Politicians are still the one class who are theortically blameless in private, as well as virtuous in public. To be found out in the slightest divergence from the strict path of moral duty is political death. You cannot have such an offender among members of the Government, even after twenty years. The memory of his transgression lives with him. When Lord Brentwood's thoughts took this turn, and he merely weighed consequences to himself, ceasing to weigh consequences to anyone else, he used almost to believe that his colleagues in the House looked at their Under-Secretary suspiciously. Had they heard some idle, malicious talk? Had they begun to suspect him?

Suddenly his uneasiness was heightened. Irene told him

that there was one person who suspected the actual state of affairs.

"I said there was nobody, but now I know there *is* one person."

"Who is it?"

"Your deputy-chairman—Sir Gregory Stuart."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"But if he guesses, others probably guess. You have done something infernally reckless—said something."

Irene vowed that she was not to blame. She had been, as indeed she always was, systematically careful and cautious. No one, except Sir Gregory, entertained the smallest suspicion of them—and he had put two and two together for himself, without assistance.

"I couldn't prevent it—I couldn't guard against it—though I have been afraid of him from the first. I have tried all along to throw dust in his eyes—even in ways that you wouldn't like. . . . Well, by being very very polite to him—and not letting him see that I thought him a beast—as I do."

Then Irene explained that Sir Gregory had for nearly a year pestered her with most unwelcome attentions, that he had professed the warmest admiration—in fact, that he had been an impudently persistent courtier.

"Shall I tell you all about it? I will, if you like."

"No, I don't want to hear. He made love to you—but you didn't care for him?"

"My prince, can you ask? When the lion is on foot, does one fall a prey to the jackal? He is jealous of you—he has watched me so closely. That is why he guessed."

"Well, what will he do? Will he play us some dog's trick—open your father's eyes?"

"Oh, no, he'll do nothing. But he'll watch us—we may be sure he'll watch us both. So I thought I had better tell you."

"Yes, you were right to tell me."

"But promise that you won't allow it to worry you. Sir Gregory couldn't hurt us, if he wished to—We need not waste a thought on *him*."

"Perhaps not—but you must be more careful. If, as you say, he will watch—well, there must be nothing for him to see."

Till now he had liked Stuart; henceforth he disliked him. Their relations were poisoned. The man's suspicion was not perhaps dangerous.—On reflection, it seemed obvious that one need not anticipate any upset of the applecart by those gross hands. The man was bound to one by business ties. He would be as tender of Lord Brentwood's reputation as of his own. Anything that threatened the chairman with disgrace must attack the welfare and credit of the companies.

Seymour thought, too, of Stuart's indiscriminately dissolute tastes—his cave full of sirens,—his Miss Danvers,—his tow-haired music-hall artist;—and he believed that Irene had exaggerated the ardor and jealousy of this middle-aged pursuer. Allowance must be made for Irene's vanity. Uneasily pondering over her disquieting announcement, Seymour came to the conclusion that Sir Gregory's conjectures or guesses were of no moment. Outwardly, Sir Gregory was the same as ever—jovial, stalwart, sanguine, looking at the chairman, Malcomson, and the others with inscrutable eyes, while step by step he led them triumphantly onwards through the last stages of his grand scheme. He could not mean mischief—least of all just now.

Once again Sir Gregory was supplying "dollops of money" for his lucky associates, extracting new capital from a greedy public, and consolidating the wide foundations of his group of enterprises. He had now carried out, with undiminished success, his supreme operation. The great amalgamation of the companies was now an accomplished fact—from the humble Beach-End to the colossally magnificent Darmstadt, the long series of flourishing hotels had now been rolled into one homogeneous financial concern. By the middle of May, the financial reconstruction was complete; and the new board, composed of the old directors, was sitting comfortably under their ornamental chairman, the Earl of Brentwood.

In June, before one could draw breath, Sir Gregory was again asking for money and getting it. This was a very small

and unimportant issue of authorized capital, to meet the demands of builders, contractors, etc. for the nearly finished wing of the Darmstadt Hotel.

Sir Gregory's June issue was absorbed without a murmur of adverse criticism. If anyone thought it odd that Sir Gregory could not have asked for all he wanted, a couple of months ago, no one said so. Really, this addition to capital account was too trifling to warrant consideration; compared with recent bulky transactions, it was like the Darmstadt laundry bill or butcher's book—a small claim to be wiped off in the natural order of events. But, inconsiderable as it was, it had the Stuart stamp of financial genius—prompt success.

From another point of view, however, the issue was of immense and startling importance. It was the last effort of Sir Gregory. The time had come when he could fold his hands and rest. In the board-room at St. James's Street, he told the chairman and directors that, with this issue, his work was done.

His good friends, the directors, were perturbed and agitated by the notion of losing the active co-operation of Sir Gregory either now or at any later period. Stuart was the life and breath of the organism: without Stuart, it might sink into inanimate torpor.

"My dear fellows," said Sir Gregory jovially. "I am touched by your kind expressions—but, I tell you, I have done my work. Waller, there, knows what the work has been. I won't blow my own trumpet. Don't grudge me my reward—a well-earned rest."

"No," said Malcomson gloomily, "but we can't get on without you yet awhile."

Sir Gregory laughed, and gave Malcomson a slap on the shoulder. "Rubbish, old boy. The thing would go on now like clock-work, if we all left it to go on by itself—We have done the trick. But when I speak of taking it easy—I don't mean chucking it altogether. I shall be at your disposal always—to advise. You may command my services whenever you fancy you want 'em. But I tell you frankly, I can't stand the tension—at the old pressure."

"The tension," said Mr. Waller, "of the last two years has been very severe."

"I tell you," said Sir Gregory, "I am a tired man. You none of you know what my life has been.—Waller knows. I had done enough for ten, before ever I started this.—I have done my work, and I am a tired man. By God, I have worked fifty years—body and brain. I've carried sacks from the steamer to the quay—But I won't bore you;" and he clenched his fist, and struck the table. "I'm tired—that's all about it."

It devolved upon the chairman now to pay Sir Gregory a few graceful compliments, to express the directors' sense of obligation for inestimable services in the past, and anticipatory thanks for the promised services in the future. Lord Brentwood, acting his part, spoke very charmingly.

"Thank you, my lord," said Sir Gregory, genially yet deferentially, looking at his complimentary chairman with inscrutable eyes.

"But one word more," said Mr. Tilney. "You're not going to begin your holiday just yet? You'll see us through the general meeting?"

"Of course I will," said Stuart, laughing and patting little Mr. Tilney's outstretched arm. "I'll do anything you want of me—except burst myself. I'll be there whenever you think I can really help."

The general meeting took place towards the end of June, in the new banqueting hall at the Darmstadt; and Sir Gregory was, as at previous meetings, the real conductor of the proceedings. The ornamental chairman presided, shed a lustre and dignity that shareholders fully appreciated; he addressed the meeting with a few well-chosen words, gracefully recited the preliminary statement provided for him; and then handed over the meeting to his practised deputy. And while Sir Gregory reeled off figures, expounded balance-sheets, read accountants' reports, the chairman looked about him, mused and dreamed, restlessly wondered, or vainly tormented himself with unanswerable questions.

There were perhaps a couple of hundred shareholders,

assembled in the vast hall that would have contained a thousand people without crowding. Lord Brentwood, looking down from his seat of honor, saw several familiar faces—amongst them, the face of his father-in-law, of Mr. Marlow, and of Mr. Philpott, his humble clerk.—As he looked at each face, Lord Brentwood asked himself if this particular shareholder knew of his treachery and was privately condemning him.

Sir Gregory congratulated shareholders and himself on the happy auspices under which they met that day. "Our task this afternoon is a light and a pleasant one. Your property as represented by this hotel is approaching completion. We have been favored in all respects—we have escaped labor disputes, stoppage by frost, damage by storm—we have not had a single accident or misadventure. . . . "

Sir Gregory congratulated shareholders and himself on the but hearty, jovial congratulations for everybody concerned. He thanked the shareholders for coming; he thanked Lord Brentwood, the directors, the advising secretary—"my very good friend, Mr. Waller;"—he thanked himself. "Your restaurant—and I hope you have all had a look at it—as well as the new fountain court, and the other parts of the building—There's nothing like seeing it for yourselves—your restaurant, as you are aware, we hastened to throw open long before anything else could be ready. Our policy was at once justified. Opened in the foggy month of November, when London is supposed to be empty, your restaurant gave us, before the festive season of Christmas, results far surpassing the modest estimates we laid before you. For the one month and seventeen days to December 31 the net profits, as you are aware, amounted to £5621 7s. 6d. For the three months to March 31, they were close upon £11,000. On this basis, it gives us the very satisfactory total of £43,000 per annum. But we prefer to be on the safe side—to allow the widest margin for fluctuation,—and we will say £40,000 a year. As a fact, our experience tells us that the fluctuation should be all the other way—I mean, in the right direction. It is increase of profits, not falling-off of profits, that I expect. Well, we will say £40,000 per annum—almost sufficient in itself for

the discharge of the annual debenture interest. Now I think that is a very comfortable little asset, and I think you'll agree with me"—and so on.

They agreed with him enthusiastically. They looked up at him in affectionate admiration. He inspired confidence, as a tried commander inspires his troops. They loved his jolly, brusque manner, his colloquial, friendly style, his square brow, his red cheeks, and the strong gestures of his big fists. Whatever he touched with those thick digits turned to gold. Shareholders always felt that they were lucky sheep to be driven by such a shepherd.

But one stupid sheep must needs attempt to be fractious and go his own way. At general meetings there seems always to be one malcontent. This afternoon it was, apparently, a typical disturber of the universal harmony and content. A small sandy man, with a budget of notes, raised his voice in carping criticism. Shareholders shouted at him and booed at him, but Sir Gregory insisted that he should be given a hearing.

"No, no. Fair play, gentlemen," cried Sir Gregory, quelling the tumult. "You have listened to me. For goodness' sake, let's hear what Mr. Lamplough has to say for himself. Fire ahead, Mr. Lamplough."

Sir Gregory did not sit down to listen. He stood, grinning good-humoredly, while sandy, note-waving Mr. Lamplough impudently attacked him.

"That's right—spit it out, Mr. Lamplough," and he laughed contemptuously. "Fire ahead."

But for Sir Gregory's insistence, the meeting would not have permitted Mr. Lamplough to waste its time.

In Mr. Lamplough's view nothing was right, everything was wrong. True that big dividends were being distributed, but what about reserve fund, depreciation, etc. etc.? What about this, and what about the other?

"Shall I reply to Mr. Lamplough at length?" asked Sir Gregory. "I think not. I rather think not. Mr. Lamplough thinks we are a set of dashed fools. Well, we think differently. All right, Mr. Lamplough. We all hope to see you here again. . . . "

The malcontent Lamplough should have felt demolished by the laughter and scorn of the meeting. The sense of the meeting was tumultuously adverse to him. He did not trouble to record his vote against the acceptance of the report, or any of the resolutions unanimously carried. The assembly would have separated in a rapturous content, but for final words of their beloved Sir Gregory.

With homely terms and friendly regret, Sir Gregory foreshadowed his retirement. He told the shareholders what he had already announced to his directors. They must not count on his co-operation for ever.

"I shall be sorry to sever my connection with you, gentlemen—But I am not as young as I used to be. That's a thing I've got to reckon with—We can't put back the clock. I propose to take it easy. And why not? I have done my work—you don't want me now—not even Mr. Lamplough, though he likes having a bang at me now and then. . . . I've worked hard, and I've made sufficient for myself and those who will come after me, and I don't mean to go on working till I drop."

There was cheering for Sir Gregory, with eulogistic praise and outpourings of gratitude for Sir Gregory. Rapturous and admiring shareholders would have burst into song and chanted his glory, but Sir Gregory firmly repressed their noisy chorus.

"No, none of that. Silence, pray silence for your chairman. . . . Thank you, all the same. We'll take it for granted. I'm a jolly good fellow, you are jolly good fellows, and so say all of us. There! I've said it for you—so don't sing it. . . . Remember our guests—the hotel is full."

Sir Gregory and Malcomson walked down Brook Street with their chairman, and both thanked him for his gracious chairmanship. Sir Gregory told them laughingly all he knew about the one malapert shareholder.

"He's a pettifogging little attorney at Eastbourne—and he has bothered me ever since we started. He took a few shares in Beach-End, and had the cheek to ask for a seat on the board. He bothered Copland about the furnishing—wanted to have his finger in the pie—and I asked him politely to go to the

deuce. . . . Then the little bounder tried to give me trouble in the constituency—and he nearly got his head broken for his pains. . . .

"Which way are you going, Brentwood? Westminster?"

Lord Brentwood was not going Sir Gregory's way.

"Well, goodbye, and thanks again," said Sir Gregory. "Those noisy beggars praised me, but we owe half our success to you, Brentwood."

"Indeed we must not forget our obligation to Lord Brentwood," said old Malcomson; and he paid the chairman a heavy and clumsily worded compliment. "As Stuart truly says, we owe you much of our success," and he pulled off his glove and offered his hand. "Moreover, we all feel gratitude for your unfailing kindness and good nature."

And instinctively Lord Brentwood heard and understood the note of sincerity in Malcomson's voice. This coarse-grained, beetle-browed old man genuinely admired him, respected him, liked him, and was grateful to him. His lordship smiled in his unfailing good nature, and felt his treachery with painful acuteness as he took the hand of Irene's father.

But his treachery did not cease. Life went on, and the treachery was like a black thread weaving itself into the pretty ornamental fabric of his days, as slowly they spread out before him. The design was ruined, the gay colors were spoilt by the black thread that mingled everywhere with the bright materials of the elegant decorative pattern.

Again, the treachery was like a wall that he had built with his own hands, in cruel labor and sleepless pain, to separate himself from the rest of the world. He had separated himself from his wife, his sister, his friends, from all mankind. He had made a self-prison; and the prisoner could not escape, or hold communion with those who were free.

Life with its infinite chances and choices rolled by him. He was acting always, never living. Outwardly, nothing that surrounded him had changed. Only to himself all seemed changed or changing.

There were the usual evening-parties at Andover House;

and Gladys did her duty well, was keeping her promise. She stood at the top of the stairs, and welcomed the ascending mob; never deserted her post, committed no solecisms. Lady Brentwood was proud and stately this season,—giving herself very decided airs, people said,—assuming the frigid dignity of the really great, although, as everybody knew, she was by birth nobody. Lord Brentwood should still have been well pleased, if he observed the altered demeanor and thought about it,—for this was what he had asked from her.

But truly, now, he could not think of her; he dared not think of her. They were good friends in public—That was sufficient. More and more, he shrank from the privacy in which he might have ascertained what sort of friends they were when alone.

She made no complaints. She showed no sign of resentment at his neglect. She seemed to accept as a quite natural arrangement, and a necessity of the parliamentary session, the fact that they should meet only on ceremonious occasions and scarcely ever talk except in company.

This was fortunate—above all fortunate, because it proved that, as Irene still assured him, she harbored no suspicion. Did it prove that? Asking himself the question, he endeavored to think, and could not do it.

Each time that he attempted now to think of his wife in relation to a possible discovery of her wrongs, he was stopped by blankness, numbness, total incapacity to obtain logical sequence of ideas. He had built the wall to shut her out—and he could not reach her now, even in thought.

His wife uttered no complaints, but his sister often complained for her. Thrice at least Lady Emily struggled to break down the wall, to force her brother to think. She upbraided him in stronger and stronger terms: her mildness disappeared; all the old admiring respect was laid aside.

"Seymour, I don't mind if it makes you angry or not. You may say I'm interfering and impertinent—you may say what you like. But I implore you not to go on neglecting your wife, as you know you are doing. . . . Why don't you look after her? Have you forgotten your responsibility? I warned you

that you were drifting apart, and you denied it. You can't deny it now."

This was when Lady Emily made her third and last attempt at interference.

"I warned you—and I warn you again. I think you are treating her very badly. You leave her to amuse herself—to form injudicious acquaintances—to run into any dangers." And Lady Emily plainly hinted that a wife so young and attractive as Gladys could not safely be deprived of a husband's protection.

"What do you mean by that? You mean more than you say. What is it?"

Then Lady Emily said she meant that Gladys was too often seen about with Mr. Harold Ingram. Lady Emily had seen them together, driving and walking.

Mr. Ingram might be a very proper friend for her troublesome brother, but he was an injudiciously selected friend for her. Mr. Ingram was a very dangerous person. Old Lady Peterhead said his reputation years ago was extremely objectionable. He caused trouble to several households; he had always been one of the most dangerous persons in London.

"I tried to drop you a hint of this, last autumn—I was thinking of this person when I first talked to you. But, Seymour, you deceived me by your assurances—and I didn't like to say what might bother you needlessly. And I hoped it would be discontinued—but it hasn't been. Look after your wife, Seymour. Caution her against this person—look after her yourself."

"Tell me all you think—since you have said so much. You don't think that she cares for him seriously?"

"I think," said his sister stoutly, "that Gladys is one of the best and purest women that ever breathed. And I think, if ever she became involved in any scandal—or gossip—or annoyance,—it would be your fault, and not hers."

"Emily, will *you* speak to her about it?"

"I? No—not again. I have spoken, and she wouldn't listen to me. She stopped me—and said she could not allow me to give her a word of advice—of that kind."

"Did she seem angry?"

"No, she seemed offended—and very proud. She is turning colder and harder than she used to be."

"Speak to her again. I know there is nothing in it. I hate this fellow, Ingram—I have always hated the sight of him. He is just a hanger-on—but I don't like to say anything to her myself. Do speak to her again."

"Seymour," said Lady Emily, "I think you must be going mad. You who were so implicitly to be relied on to do everything you ought—you now neglect—you seem deaf to the loudest call. You seem as if nothing could make you rouse yourself and do your duty. It is your first duty—your paramount duty—to guard and protect your wife. I have warned you of possible danger to her. Surely that is enough to rouse you."

He did nothing. He was not going mad, but the Irene-virus was poisoning him. He was a man in a dream, a sleep-walker, a drugged actor performing an oft-repeated part. He could not wake and pull himself together;—he could not rouse himself, or essay unrehearsed motions and words.

He hated this Ingram,—but did not believe that his wife's virtue was a thing assailable by him or anybody else. He trusted her goodness absolutely. His own deceit and betrayal seemed to render him more certain that she could not be false. He wished that this insolent conceited scoundrel was dead. He wished that duelling was still a customary practice of polite society, and that they might stand facing one another with pistols in their hands. He wished that chance would throw them together, in some lonely place, where they might fight with their fists. He burned with rage at the idea of the impudent brute daring ever to look at Gladys—although he did not for a moment dread the blackguard's power, or entertain one doubt of his wife's strength of resistance. He brooded angrily; he confused himself with plots and devices; he fumed and fussed and fretted. But he did nothing.

The Irene-virus was in his veins, now sending numbness and torpor to his brain, now setting it on fire. He and she met

less frequently. She came no more now to Andover House. She still retained her secret key, but she had ceased to use it. There had not, however, been any break in the habit of their friendship. The habit was now firmly established. She was sure of her slave—when she pleased, she could command him.

Thus the long hot summer dragged away, the long dull session drew towards its close, and he was sick and weary of all things. He longed for rest, for fresh air, for new scenes. He could not sleep, he could not eat, he could not think.

But Irene still held him fast-bound by the chains of habit. She fatigued him physically and mentally; she kept him in a perpetual unhealthy excitement. She over-stimulated his nervous system, she depressed the action of his heart, she lowered his vitality. She played the very devil with him.

XXXVII

MISS MALCOMSON boasted that it was she who had founded the fortunes of Miss Yates, her dressmaker. Fat, jolly Miss Yates, when she heard such boasts, said, "That's rather a large order; but you have always been a good friend to me, Miss Irene, and I don't forget it." Irene also boasted that Miss Yates made gowns for her of the girdled Empire style as long ago as when Miss Yates lived in humbleness and obscurity at Notting Hill Gate—that is to say, six years before this particular mode became prevalent and hackneyed.

"Ah, that's true," said jolly Miss Yates. "I'll bear you out in *that*. You were ahead of everybody with the high-waisters."

Miss Yates and her partner, Lady Edward Hernshaw, were now famous as Antoinette of Albermarle Street. Yates was an indomitable worker, the brains and vertebral cord of the business—but she would not have climbed to fame and opulence without Hernshaw. Lady Edward beat about the world, and drove in customers. Lady Edward was of course well known—perhaps too well known—in society; but people who

would not have asked her to dinner were very glad to call upon her, and see all the pretty things of Antoinette in Albemarle Street. There were charming water-color sketches on easels—designs for frocks by Lady Edward,—supposed to have been painted by Lady Edward, who in fact had never painted anything except her own face. But if your fancy was caught by the brush-work of Lady Edward's artistic ghost, you could get the sketch "realized" by Antoinette. You would have to pay heavily for backing your fancy, because Antoinette was at the very top of the fashion. Her success was like that of Monsieur Nicolas: Antoinette could not be too insolent, or too extortionate.

Antoinette's drawing-rooms were furnished with the greatest taste; her looking-glasses were the kindest in London; her assistants were charming and slender—more dignified and not less handsome than the show-girls of a musical comedy. There were liquors in a cupboard for morning visitors, and afternoon callers might obtain always a cup of deliciously expensive tea. You could fill in happy hours at Antoinette's. A group of stupid women—of the highest rank and the meanest intelligence—would gather in a boudoir upstairs, and watch one of the beautiful assistants dress herself. The girl appeared in a *sortie-de-bain,* and was slowly clothed with diaphanous undergarments, while raddled grinning Lady Edward lectured and tried to be funny. She was not by nature a wag.

"Now she is ready to be seen—by her husband. No one else, of course. . . . Rest yourself, Diane. Take a cig." And the girl reclined upon a sofa, with arms above her head, and blew out rings of smoke.

"Oh, what lovely rings she blows," cried one of the stupid women.

"Don't she look sweet?" said Lady Edward. "How pleased her husband will be. . . . Is that you, Alexander? Come in. The door isn't bolted. I mustn't bolt the door against my lord and master."

And then idiotic women laughed hysterically. Lady Edward needed not wit.

More lace-bordered clothes were put on—then stays, etc.

"Now," said Lady Edward, "anybody may see her. Tell Captain Lothair he may come up now"—and they all laughed again.

And they would buy avidly. They had not Diane's figure —no matter! Knickers at twenty guineas, camisole at thirty, petticoats at forty, *sortie-de-bain,* etc.—the whole bag of fallals for 170 guineas! Happy and instructive hours—an afternoon at Antoinette's flew swiftly for these little knots of really fine ladies.

Well then, Lady Edward was worth her place in the firm; and the other half, the better half, never grudged her the easily earned swag that she carried away from Albemarle Street. Miss Yates, rich and prosperous, liked the swells as customers, and even as friends; but she was no snob. She was kind and generous to her relations—a fat, brave, jolly soul, quite unspoilt by success. She had a house on the river at Pangbourne —a long, low, rambling house, with sun-blinds, verandahs, loggias,—with surrounding lawns, hammocks, chairs, and cushions,—with landing stages, punts, skiffs, steam pinnaces,— with brightness, gaiety, untrammelled liberty,—with everything requisite to a Thames-side summer home. Lady Edward— who was a sort of partner in the house as well as in the business —got up week-end parties, brought down swells, elderly nobles dancing attendance on grass widows, mature married dames with their pet boys, and so forth—until the house had a certain fame and name. Tom Malcomson gave it almost the worst name you can give a house—tried and failed to prevent his wife from going there.

Yet one might say, so far as Miss Yates was concerned, the house was idyllically innocent. She used it solely for the entertainment of her poor relations. It was only from Saturday to Monday that you could possibly be justified in speaking of the house opprobriously. In what is termed the parson's week, there was no bridge, much less the old-fashioned baccarat or the noisy foolish roulette; there was nothing but simple comfort and honest mirth. And Miss Yates did not pay a penny to the swell week-end parties. She gave Lady Edward free swing—washed her hands of it, and just enjoyed

herself. Ladies brought footmen; gentlemen brought confidential servants—sent cooks, and wine, fruit, flowers;—it was a pleasant picnic, for which one squared up with Lady Edward. Miss Yates did thoroughly enjoy the society of the swells—they were so friendly and jolly; and hitherto she had not been privileged to associate with them on such easy terms. They called Lady Edward Toinette, and then they invented Ante or Ant for Miss Yates—cleverly dividing the name Antoinette,—and soon this was Auntie—dear old Aunt Yates.

This summer there had been few Sundays without an interesting Pangbourne assembly; and now, at the very end of the London season, a really brilliant week-end party was arranged at Aunt Yates's for Miss Irene Malcomson. Lord Brentwood was doing the party for her, and Mr. Marlow was doing the party for him. Outwardly, of course, Lady Edward did the party. Lady Edward issued the invitations, but none other than Irene's friends were bidden. They were the most fashionable of her new acquaintance. Irene was at the zenith. Water-color sketches had been realized for her—three wonderful new dresses were to be worn; the big rubies were to be displayed; from Friday to Monday she would be queen, with hostess, guests, Marlow, and his men, bowing to the ground before her. Carelessly perhaps, she would let already initiated courtiers see the imperious sway that she exercised over her splendid admirer.

But as chance willed it, here in the summer home of obliging Aunt Yates, Lord Brentwood was to break his chains.

He motored down from London in time for luncheon on Friday; found Marlow commanding, some of the week-enders already assembled, and Irene languidly queening it. The day was hot and still: not a breath of air rustled the fringes of the sun-blinds; the river sparkled and burned like liquid glass. Irene was headachy and inclined to be peevish, unwilling to trouble herself by amusing early arrivals, desirous of conserving energy for fireworks at dinner and during the evening, when all her guests would be there to admire and wonder. After luncheon she made Seymour take charge of people, and conduct

them for a trip down stream in the steam launch. One of the ladies wanted to call at a house by the waterside near Reading. Irene said it would be a nice excursion, and despatched Lord Brentwood on convoy-duty. She preferred not to accompany them—and therefore did not do so. She would rest, smoke cigarettes, and possibly sleep.

She stood on the landing stage, and languidly waved her red Japanese umbrella as the boat glided away. Then, with a sudden unchecked impulse, she kissed her hand to Lord Brentwood.

Languidly strolling across the lawn towards the house, she saw a young man on the gravel drive that led from the high road to Miss Yates's front porch. The young man was about to disappear round a corner of the house, when Irene was struck by something familiar in his aspect. Quite a common young man—but she rather thought she had seen him before, was languidly curious, and called him to her.

"What do you want? Are you Mr. Papworth's servant?"

The young man was Mr. Philpott, the clerk at Andover House; and he explained that he had been sent with an urgent letter for Lord Brentwood.

"Very well," said Irene, "I'll give it to him;" and she held out her hand.

"I'd like to give it to him myself, miss. It's very important," and Mr. Philpott hesitated. "Could I see his lordship? There'll prob'ly be an answer."

Irene told him that Lord Brentwood was out, and Mr. Philpott's face fell.

"That's awkward, miss."

Miss Malcomson's curiosity was aroused; she became at once less languid.

"Why is it awkward?"

"Well, miss, awkward for me in this way—I didn't want to be kep' waiting if I could 'elp it," and Mr. Philpotts looked at his watch. "I wanted to catch the 3.15 train."

"But you are told to wait for an answer?"

"Well, they didn't *say* so—but they said to reach his lordship without a moment's delay."

Miss Malcomson's curiosity was sharpened.

"Come into the house," she said. "I should think you had better wait. Lord Brentwood will not be away very long —two or three hours."

She led the young man through the hall to one of Miss Yates's pretty parlors—a charming cool little room, full of books, china, chintz-covered chairs, with a broad mullioned window and a cushioned window-seat beneath it.

"Come in here, please. Shut the door. . . . Is the letter from Lady Brentwood?"

"No. It's from Lady Em'ly."

"From Lady Emily! Is she at Andover House?"

Young Mr. Philpott explained that Lady Emily had called at Andover House to see Lord Brentwood, and had been much upset by hearing that he was gone from London. She had entered the secretary's office and demanded Lord Brentwood's address. But Mr. Roberts did not choose to give the address. "You know, miss, his lordship's orders is not to be bothered when he is away—like this," and the young man glanced at Irene with a somewhat cockneyfied intelligence in his expression. "Not to be bothered—that's our orders. But Lady Em'ly went on anyhow—said she'd wait to see her ladyship, and made us fetch down Miss Vickers——"

"I thought Lady Brentwood was going to Collingbourne Court?"

"No, her ladyship isn't going. It's put off—Miss Vickers said there'd been a change of plan."

"Oh! Then did Lady Emily see Lady Brentwood?"

"No, she waited half an hour, and then she let fly at Mr. Roberts again—and the upshot was, he says he'd send through any letter or telegram to his lordship. Lady Em'ly sits down at Mr. Roberts's table, and writes the letter; and I am borrowed to carry it. Very nice for me, this afternoon I've been promised to have off——"

"Do you mean for a holiday?"

Yes; Mr. Philpott meant that, counting on his *congé,* he had pledged the afternoon to the service of "the young lady" to whom he was engaged. He did not anticipate that his

fiancée would in a hurry forgive him for chucking her over.

"You know what young ladies are"—and he looked at Irene ruefully—"when they've put 'em all on—and then are kep' watching the clock. . . . But I s'pose I must wait."

Irene was silent for a few moments. Then she spoke decisively.

"No, you shan't forfeit your afternoon. You need not wait. You can leave the letter."

"Think so, miss?"

"Yes—put it down. No, give it to me. I undertake to deliver it. That is quite right. You need have no misgivings—I will tell his lordship that *I* dismissed you."

"But if I should get into a scrape over it——"

"You shan't do that. *I* exonerate you. Now, run and catch your train. I hope you'll have a happy afternoon."

"Thank you, miss. . . . But would his lordship telegraph—or would you, miss—if it wasn't troubling you too much—would *you* see as a telegram was sent to Lady Em'ly saying when her letter has been received?"

"Lady Emily lives in Hill Street, doesn't she? What number?"

"Hundred and two, Matlock House. It's flats."

"Matlock House, a hundred and two, Hill Street, W. Yes, I'll see that a telegram is sent to her."

"Thank you, miss. That'll stop her fussing Mr. Roberts for what's become of me—and why ever doesn't your messenger bring the answer, Mr. Roberts?"

The elated young man was impudent enough to attempt an imitation of Lady Emily's voice, but Miss Malcomson did not smile.

"I have told you that you may go."

"Thanks, miss," and Mr. Philpott bowed himself from the room, and hurried away to the railway station.

Irene, alone with the letter, stood by the window and looked out at the bright flower beds, and the shadow and sunlight on the grass borders. She balanced the envelope delicately across the palm of her hand, held it up to the light,

examined the superscription as if trying to learn secrets from handwriting, turned over the envelope, and with her finger-nail tested the adhesion of the gummed flap. Then, with a sudden curious fierceness, she tore open the envelope, boldly pulled out the letter and read it.

Reading, her face paled, was white, red, and white again; she vibrated with excitement; her eyes flashed and glittered, grew dark and clouded, and glowed brighter than before. No more languor, or conservation of energy, headache forgotten—she paced the room, murmured, frowned, and smiled. She raised a hand to her forehead, and pressed her throbbing temples. She was alone with the letter—no one to observe her—and yet never in her life had she been more theatrical of manner and gesture.

Presently, looking like a tragedy queen, she sat crouched on the window seat, clasped her hands round her knees, and stared before her, large-eyed, quick-breathing, inaudibly muttering.

She sat quite still for a long time; and when her eyes moved, her limbs had a spasmodic jerk as of a person startled or even frightened. She was thinking that, while she crouched motionless, the blind forces of nature were acting as her servants, bringing towards her by their irresistible pressure all that her feeble hands were powerless to grasp or draw. She felt that destiny was working for her—if she stirred or spoke, the wonderful fateful work would cease. If she gave no sign of life—if she pretended to sleep, aped the conscienceless attitude of death,—destiny would do all the work for her. This was a sensation rather than a thought—passing in a few moments. She unclasped her hands, and moved uneasily; then threw back her head, in joy or defiance. . . . Let the work go on. —Destiny is a tremendous awe-inspiring assistant: his work is surprising, colossally magnificent, triumphantly successful: his work must not be frustrated by us poor trembling mortals. . . . Such, perhaps, were the tragedy-queen reflections of vibrating Irene.

She took the letter upstairs to her bedroom and locked it in a dressing-case. Then she put on a hat, walked out of

the house, went to the village post office and telegraphed to Lady Emily in these words:—

"Letter received. Do nothing. I am attending to the matter. Brentwood."

She did not give Lord Brentwood his letter.

Throughout the afternoon she was in almost incessant movement—coming out into the hall at every sound, walking up and down the short carriage drive—waiting for the postman, asking when the next post would arrive, bothering Mr. Marlow and his well-trained men.

"Where is Mr. Marlow now? Send him to me at once. . . . Give us tea outside—away from the house—by the landing stage. And don't let us be disturbed—we all want to be quiet."

Then she told Marlow that if any telegram or message came for his lordship, it was to be given to her.

"If anyone calls to see him—send for me. I'll see the person, whoever it is. Do you understand? His lordship is not to be bothered. He has come down here for rest and quiet. He is not to be bothered with business, or anything, until Monday. You understand—he is not supposed to be here at all."

Mr. Marlow bows and smiles gravely. Mr. Marlow knows that it is her party—it is to her that he looks for orders. Her word is law, at any rate in this house.

She welcomed the passengers on the returning steam launch; she presided at tea in the garden; she jumped up from her chair to receive Miss Yates, and walked across the lawn to meet others of her guests. She laughed shrilly and gaily: she was nervous, jerky, a young lady with the abrupt gestures of wire-pulled marionettes—but nobody noticed that excitable Miss Irene was more overstrung than usual. Everybody, however, noticed her absorbing proprietorial manner in regard to Lord Brentwood. She kept him in close attendance, would not permit him to wander from her sight.

At dinner she was in splendid form—causing all to laugh at her sprightly sallies, mischievous chaff, and audacious *sous-entendus*. In spite of previous expenditure of nerve-force, she

had waves of it to spread and squander. Her conversation was all fire-works. Aunt Yates and Lady Edward might well look at her with pride.

In her red tulle and dyed lace, she did credit to the skill and invention of Antoinette. Her lips were as red as her dress; her eyes were bright as the incandescent bulbs of the table lamps; her ruby collar glowed like blood or wine in the lamplight. Tolerant and admiring friends could not marvel at anybody's abject subjugation by such charms; but they thought the young lady's careless assumption of proprietorship just a little bit too strong for the best society—even when picnicking from Friday to Monday with Aunt Yates. Lady Edward ought to give her a hint.

Next day, Saturday, Irene appeared haggard, with dark circles round her eyes, and red spots on her cheek-bones;—but she was still on tight-pulled wires, jerking, jumping—laughing more shrilly than ever, and not making jokes first to justify laughter. She was so nervous and jumpy—one of her friends said—that she induced jumpiness in others. "Poor Irene—can't she take some drugs or something? Aunt Yates, tell her to lie down—and get her phenacetin or something." But Irene would not go to bed again. She was all right—only one of her headaches—too much sunshine yesterday.

At luncheon she startled everybody by giving a little hysterical shriek and springing up from the table.

"What on earth is the matter now, Irene?"

Irene apologized and laughed shrilly. It was Aunt Yates's grandfather clock in the hall that made Irene jump. The stupid old clock wheezed and grunted, clicked and clacked before striking the hour, and the absurd sounds jarred upon Irene's overstrung nerves.

"There! It's going to strike," she cried. "One! two! Now it's done—Two o'clock;" and she laughed and resumed her seat. "Oh, Aunt Yates, why do you have such a cranky old grandfatherly time-piece—that won't let the hours go by without hiccoughing and forcing all the world to listen?"

"My dear Miss Irene," said jolly Miss Yates; "what an

indictment—to be sure! You'll want the river stopped next—because it makes a noise going over the weir."

All through this second afternoon the proprietorial interest was observable. No one might walk or punt or lounge with Lord Brentwood. Irene kept him to herself, could not part with him for a minute. Late in the afternoon, when tea was done and it was almost time to think of dinner, she took him to the house, and asked him to sit with her in Miss Yates's parlor.

"Wait for me there, dearest. I must fetch something from upstairs. I won't be a moment."

She came into the room presently, and went to the cushioned window ledge.

"Sit down, Seymour. I have something for you—But first I must talk to you. . . . Do sit down. . . . No. Sit by me—here—where I can see the face I love—to give me courage."

Lord Brentwood pulled his moustache, put his hand across his mouth, and repressed a tendency to yawn.

"Courage! What is it? Antoinette! A check on account?"

"No. I'll tell you. But first—I must remind you of how I love you. I wonder if you believe—I swear I have given you all the love of which I am capable. I swear it. All that I am—good and bad—is yours. If I had been entirely—innocent, you couldn't—I couldn't have given you more. That's my love—myself. If I presumed on it ever—Seymour, you'd forgive me—because of the love. You wouldn't forget that."

"But I want to hear——"

"I'll tell you. Circumstances are changing. It is destiny. I have done nothing to help things on—quicker. They have happened. I tell you—destiny."

"Why can't you say what it is? You have been found out?"

"Yes—in one respect. I didn't tell you everything. Someone else knows——"

"Your father knows?"

"No—not a suspicion. . . . But Gladys knows."

"Then you have lied to me."

"Only lately. She didn't guess—when I first spoke of her.

She did—afterwards. Yes, then I lied to you—I couldn't help it. I'll tell you why."

"How long has she known?"

"Oh, not very long—that is, I don't think——"

"Is that a lie too?"

"No, this is the truth. I swear there shall be no more lies. One night at Andover House—the last time I was there—at the party—she wouldn't shake hands with me. I wasn't sure—but I met her in a shop—and she cut me. I spoke to her—and asked her why—and she didn't answer. So then—I was sure she knew that I had taken you from her. What else could it be?"

"You should have told me at once. I can never forgive you for not telling me."

"Yes, my prince, you must forgive me—for everything. I didn't tell you—because I thought she didn't mind. I thought—she was getting over it—in the best way."

"What do you mean?"

"She doesn't care. Gladys has consoled herself."

"That's another damnable lie."

"It's the truth. But that's not all. Gladys is setting us free—No, you must hear. Give me your hand. . . . Don't—oh, my king, don't be cruel. Don't—listen. It's true—it is destiny. Gladys is going out of your life—with her lover. . . .

" . . . Seymour, come here and sit down—and be sensible. . . . A letter has arrived for you. Now, don't be angry—I opened it. I have read it. Shall I tell you what it says?"

He snatched the crumpled letter from her hand.

"It is from your sister, Lady Emily. She was greatly upset,—and it's difficult to read—but you won't mistake her meaning."

His face had flushed; his fingers shook as he unfolded the paper.

"Can't you hold your tongue—and let me read it?"

"Yes—yes—but the gist of it is this: your wife has deceived you. Your wife is leaving you. Soon you will have no wife."

"I warned you," wrote Lady Emily, in a tremulous splashy handwriting, with an incoherence and lack of punctuation caused by haste and anxiety. "I warned you of your danger, but did not think it would burst upon us so soon. This morning I went to the Library in Cockspur Street and Gladys was outside. She did not see me. She was with that man. I was some time changing my books and when I came out they were coming out of the steamboat office close by where they had been together. I went to them to speak and she did not see me. She was agitated and he was talking to her, and he hailed a cab and they drove away together.

"I went straight into the steamboat office—because I felt certain there was something dreadfully wrong, and I asked what they wanted there. He had taken a two berth cabin in the *Verona* for New York. The clerk gave me the name at once—Mr. Harold Ingram, and then the manager came and said they could not give me any more information. But the ship is the *Verona* from Southampton to-morrow, and if you do not stop her she will go with him. I saw her agitation. It is exactly what has filled me with fear as what might happen.

"I have tried to see Gladys here but cannot—And they won't tell me how to get to you—but they promise this shall reach you in two hours. Wire to me how I can help. But what can I do? It is you who must stop her.

"The manager said the boat sails to-morrow at 2 p.m. at latest. EMILY."

"Have you read it?" asked Irene vehemently. "Do you understand it all?"

Seymour sprang to his feet, and stood staring at her.

"But, good God—when did this come?"

"Yesterday—about three o'clock."

"And you dared to open it—and keep it back from me?"

She flung her arms round him and tried to cling to him, but he shook her off.

"Yes—It was the best thing to do—for your sake as much as mine . . . Oh, my king, don't be cruel—Forgive me. Speak to me."

"I'll never forgive you. To my dying day I'll never speak to you again."

"Seymour!"

"I must go to my wife—I must go to her."

He was walking about the pretty little room, gesticulating in an extraordinary fashion. It seemed as if he was struggling for breath; he gasped as one almost choking. He waved his arms, clenched his fists, strained and wrestled, as if he had been tied by invisible chains and was making frenzied efforts to burst them.

"I must get to her—I must get to her."

"It is too late. She has gone. The ship sailed at two to-day."

"I'll follow her. I'll charter another vessel and overtake them. Keep away—Let go my arm."

"Seymour, my loved king. It is fate—not our fault. Don't be angry with me."

"Marlow," he shouted. "Where's Marlow?"

"Think—think of my love. She is setting you free.—She has left you of her own will. Now you and I may face the world together."

He tore himself from her clinging hands, and went raging and shouting into the hall.

"Who's there? Marlow! Where's the A.B.C.? You—you there—run and bring my car. . . . Marlow—I must get to London. Shall I go in the motor—or by train? How can I get there quickest? I am going to Southampton afterwards. Help me to get away."

"Irene, what is it?" asked Lady Edwards, looking scared beneath her paint.

"Miss Irene—Really, Miss Irene," said Aunt Yates—"you are all making such a noise."

Irene was sobbing loudly, wringing her hands, and writhing. Doors had opened in all directions. One after another, members of the house-party came into the little hall, until it was full of people. All talked at once, and Irene sobbed louder and louder.

"The train, my lord," said Marlow. "Seventeen minutes

to catch it. Plenty of time." He was business-like, imperturbable, in the midst of all the racket. "Telephone to the station for a cab for his lordship."

"Don't let him go," howled Irene; and again she clung and writhed.

"Miss Irene—please"—Aunt Yates was shocked, but sympathetic.

"I'll send on everything in the car, my lord."

"Toinette—oh, Toinette"—Irene was howling on Lady Edward's shoulder now. "Tell him to forgive me. Oh, don't leave me. Toinette, tell him how I love him."

"Your hat, my lord."

"Oh, oh, oh—Toinette, make him forgive me."

"Hush, hush, Miss Irene."

"I don't care. You all know what he has been to me—and he wants to throw me over. I have made him angry and he won't forgive me."

"Irene—my poor dear, don't faint down here." Lady Edward was ringing electric bells, calling out orders with piercing shrillness. "Get her upstairs. Hold her head. Don't let her put her head down. . . . "

Seymour ran along the gravel drive, and out into the dusty high road.

It was a horrid noisy scandalous exit for Lord Brentwood, Under Secretary of State.

Business-like, imperturbable Mr. Marlow superintended the packing of my lord's luggage, saw it stowed away in the big motor-car, and very soon had despatched car, luggage, chauffeur, and valet, to pursue my lord to London.

Then, in the short breathing space before dinner, he took out his stylographic pen, and with a niggling copper-plate hand wrote to an old client.

"Look here, Jack," said Marlow to one of his men. "I shall have this little note for you to take back with you to-night. . . . Get a good cab at Paddington, and cut across to Knightsbridge." . . . Marlow tapped his pen against his left wrist, and began writing—

"To Sir Gregory Stuart, K. C. M. G., M. P. *Private.*

"Sir,—*re* the lady I have been watching in accordance with your instructions:—Have now the pleasure to report, I believe that affair is over. There has been a regular rumpus. And although I am ignorant of the reasons, so far as I can judge, the split is not likely to be patched up. Should you desire to re-open communications, the lady is here till Monday.

"Your obedient Servant,

"Geo. Marlow."

XXXVIII

THE train, rushing onward, seemed to stand still. Twilight fields, dusky woods, hills that rose above white mist, seemed to follow the train and defeat its purpose: the petty, trivial landscape seemed invincible, seemed to fly with the flying wheels. The wind blew upon Seymour's forehead, the leaves of the A.B.C. guide flapped in his hands, everything told him of swift motion; and yet the train made no progress, could but twist and turn, as if impeded, baffled by the sluggish river, as if losing courage from opposition, frightened and held back by the gathering dusk. Lights showed in a roadside cottage. The train crashed over a girdered bridge, roared between brick walls, swept like an earthquake through a station. A blaze of light, ghostly faces, black shadows of signal posts and telegraph poles dragged backward across the window glass,—and again the open fields and hedgerows creeping slowly behind one. Reading station,—thirty-six more miles. It will take an eternity of time.

The cursed train was not faster than a motor-car—was slower than a ship.

In a moment he saw it—a black speck, a ribbon of smoke, on the wide sea,—the strong swift ship that was carrying his wife away from him. Memory and imagination did their busy torturing work, took control of his brain, flashed their luminous pictures upon the thought-screens. Out there, on the western

plains of water, the sun was still high; little waves danced and broke into lambent flame; sunbeams threw the shadow of canvas awnings on polished decks; brass sparkled; a dome of burnished glass had a crystal glitter; and the funnels were like the black towers of a manufacturing town, belching forth voluminous sooty clouds to hide the bright sky and stain the clean sea. The ship was as big as a town—a close-packed hive of human life,—streets piled on streets to hold thousands of inhabitants, and then set floating, throbbing, plodding, in a vastness that made it seem a grain of dust. But space could not daunt it; time helped it on its way; the sun soared in the heaven to give it more light. The swift-moving town would beat the hours in its westward race. The globe was revolving, to spin her away from him.

One might dwell in the town for a week and not learn the faces of one's neighbors. But somewhere in the decked streets he would see her.—And the cruel mental picture flashed and glowed. He had seen her—soothed, fondled, consoled—in another man's arms. The light turned red on the thought-screens, the pictures were blotted out by dense darkness—the ship and the sky and sea were gone.

What to do? Impotent despair possessed him. When he thought of the man, hot knives stabbed him, burning claws tore him, iron collars throttled him. Call him to account, punish him—kill him, and sleep once more? He should never sleep while the man lived. And again a sick horror of impotence overwhelmed him. Punishment, vengeance—what are they? If a wretch burn the Raphaels in the Pitti palace, or undermine, blow up, and bring down Giotto's fane—how shall we punish him? Will torture make him paint or build? Can he repair the irreparable?

What to do? He would go to Southampton to-night,—ask questions, assure himself of the consummation of his disaster. But first he would go to Andover House—there, perhaps, a farewell letter lay waiting for him. In imagination he read it—the few words with which she would tell him that he had lost her for ever. He was sure that she would send him such a letter. He must follow them in the next

ship. That fancy about chartering a vessel was absurd and futile. Impossible. The meaningless cry of impotent wealth. All his wealth would not help him. In this realm of passion and pain, gold is not current. Money and other futilities were done with—he had been flung headlong among the realities.

Rank, influence, friends in high places, could not avail him. If he told his sorrow and disgrace to the Government, and in pity they lent him their best cruiser, it could not overtake her.

Slow boat from Southampton to-morrow, fast boat from Liverpool Tuesday—he would sail on Tuesday's boat. Two—nearly three days before he could start in pursuit. Till Tuesday he would send her wireless messages—message after message. "You are mine—you are still mine—you are always mine."

He must cable to people in New York—lawyers and detectives—anybody Killick could suggest. She must be met by many people,—long cable messages from himself,—people to threaten and seize the man, hold the man for vengeance. Alas that people cannot do this for him! If she will not surrender herself, detectives must follow her. Detectives must meet him and lead him to her hiding-place, wherever it is. . . . Perhaps the fugitives will cross the broad continent, take ship again—He must follow them from East to West, and West to East, with the sun or against it, round the spinning world, till he can find her and wrest her from the man.

The train rushed onward; the wind blew upon him sharper and colder. It was dark now, and out of the darkness came—like roadside lamps—little flickering gleams of hope, to mock and torment him. Suppose that he should find her at Andover House—not gone yet. Suppose there has been unforeseen delay, and he is yet in time to stop her. Emily may have done his work, and saved his wife! . . . No—she has gone.

Blank darkness again outside the open window—no twinking roadside lamps, no feeble hopes.

He ceased to think of the man, and thought only of Gladys. He could think of her now—the walls were down, his chains had burst, the virus was fading from his veins.

He thought of her as he first knew her—pale and sad,—

resisting him, turning to him with entreaty,—giving him compassionate kindness, and then unsullied love. He had wished to debase her.—She was pure, and he had been willing that she should soil herself for his sake. But she would not yield. He had striven to drag her down, and she had lifted him up. Strength flowed from her, and her purity was her strength. She had tried to give him strength. How good she had been to him!

The old thoughts seemed to sweep on the night wind, beating through his forehead, filling his brain, and cleansing it. He remembered her patience, her gentleness, her pride—good pride, all good, springing from staunch affections, based on firm principles. He thought of her candor and innocence—the sweet music of her voice, the trustful appeal of her eyes. He could see her—the symbol that hung upon her immature bosom, rising and falling with her breath; and, beneath the heart-shaped trinket, the live heart that beat with love for him. He thought of her beauty—sweet and pure,—something of soft inward light shining into one's breast, warming and melting it, so that one might feel, mingling with desire, the instinct of protection, as when one looks at a child or a bird. He remembered how he had yearned over her—longing to guard her, fight for her, toil for her. That was just before their marriage. He remembered his unspoken vows, when they stood in the church and she put her life into his keeping. The words of the priest were not all: he had made words for himself. She was purity incarnate when God and the priest heard the words of his mind and the words of his voice—and yet he had driven her to this.

With the old thoughts came the old love, stronger, fuller, deeper. How good she had been to him—how immeasurably good. He remembered the selfish brooding pain of his journey a year ago—when her flight was the foreshadowing of to-day's shame. Then, he had pursued her in egoistic querulous rage, counting his kindnesses, adding up each trivial benefit conferred, to make a title for her gratitude—to weigh down her faithful love with his careless gold. Now, all the process of his thought was reversed. He was thinking of her goodness,

not of his. How good she had been to him. That journey and the recovery of her love should have proved a warning, sufficient to prepare him for the journey he must now take. He had won her back—only a year ago. And yet now he had driven her from him irrevocably.

The guilt and the shame were his, not hers. He was thinking of her and nothing else now. Anger sank, revenge sank, remorse absorbed him. His wife—nothing else mattered. The man dropped from his thoughts plunged into oblivion, as a pebble falling from relaxed fingers into a well. The man was nothing—an instrument, the first trumpery weapon that he himself had used. If, in madness, one grasps a hammer to smash a vase—need one, when sanity returns, smash the hammer too? . . . The shame and the guilt were his—not hers.

But he had trusted her purity; never for a moment till now had he doubted her strength. She was unassailable—she needed no guards. This perhaps was the belief that had blinded him to the enormity of his neglect of duty, that had rendered him deaf to all warnings. She was essentially, intrinsically pure: no dirt could ever soil her. Even now, the thing seemed outside the range of possibility—monstrous, unbelievable as the illogical horror-hunt of a nightmare dream.

And again hope mocked him. Had Emily done his work? He was certain that, if he had been by the side of his wife, he could have held her to him. A word would have saved her—spoken by him or by anybody. One thought of the child she had borne him would have kept her true: dead or alive, the child is the bond that holds them as one. . . . Could she forget it? Was there no one to remind her? That was what he would have said to her. "You must never leave me—you *cannot* leave me." But his sister would not understand—she would speak of religion, propriety, respectability. Could no one remind her?

No one.—Hope gleamed, grew faint, died out.

The train glided beneath bridges, by the side of goods yards, in the white flare of the arc lamps, and he did not care if it moved fast or slow. It was stopped by a signal, and then

crept on again beneath more bridges—very slowly creeping to its rest under the glass roofs at the journey's end.

Time enough—a lifetime if necessary;—rage gone, only sadness and remorse in his mind now. Futilities done with—only realities left. He must not think of himself—only Gladys matters: all else is futile and unreal.

He must follow her and win her back. He must forgive her. The guilt and the shame are his. He must save her from the shame, he must win her from the guilt. He must follow her till he find her—he must take her from the man, for her sake and not for his own. He must win her back.—Time and space cannot sunder them. Far or near, sooner or late, she shall remember and confess the truth: they two are one and indivisible till death do them part.

Andover House seemed preternaturally quiet, emptied of life, a home deserted, though lamps were burning in the corridors and on the stairs. Servants, hurrying to his call, exhibited surprise, and, as he fancied, fear. They were startled by his sudden entry. They looked wonderingly at his white face and drawn lips. They stammered out their answers to his harsh-voiced questions.

"Is there any letter for me from her ladyship?"

"From her ladyship? No, my lord. I don't think so; but I'll ask Mr. Osborn."

"No letter—or telegram? What time did her ladyship go?"

"Early in the morning, my lord. The carriage was ordered a quarter past nine—Here is Mr. Osborn, my lord."

"Oh—Osborn—didn't her ladyship leave some letter or packet for me?"

"Her ladyship? No, my lord—But Lady Emily has left three letters for you, my lord—Lady Emily is very anxious to see you, my lord."

"Yes—I know. Did her ladyship give any messages to Vickers?"

"No, my lord—That is, only about there being no dinner to-night. Should I order any dinner to be prepared for you, my lord?"

"No. I—I am not stopping here. But I'll see Vickers. Did her ladyship's luggage go this morning—or before?"

"The luggage? Oh, didn't you know, my lord, that her ladyship wasn't going to Collingbourne Court?"

"Yes, I knew."

"Her ladyship has been to Southampton——"

"Yes, I tell you, I know—Where's Vickers?"

"I think she's with her ladyship, in the library, my lord. Her ladyship rang for her a few minutes ago."

His hand shook so that he could scarcely turn the handle of the door, and he came bursting into the library with a violence that made his wife give a startled cry as she rose from her chair. She stood looking at him, as his servants had done, wonderingly.

"Gladys," he said hoarsely. "Gladys—Gladys."

"What is it, Seymour? I thought you were far away."

"I—I thought you——" He was staring at her, and gasping for breath. "You—you have come back. When?"

"About an hour ago. What is it? Do you want anything?"

"Yes—I want you. I—I want you, Gladys, you——"

"Are you staying here to-night? If so—will it do to-morrow? I have had a fatiguing day, and a very sad one."

He could see that she had been crying; but she was perfectly calm and self-possessed. Her black dress made her seem very pale. She seemed, too, very fragile—a tall slim figure of a girl, delicate and graceful, needing much care, much love. That old yearning instinct of protection thrilled diffusively through his brain.

"You—you went to Southampton by the boat express."

"Yes."

"Gladys—you must tell me. You—you weren't alone. You went with that man—Ingram."

Her attitude changed—a faint color came into her face, and it hardened. She looked at him steadily and proudly.

"Have you a right to ask me who I go with—to-day or any day?"

"Yes, I must know—I do know. Gladys, I know he was with you."

"Then why do you ask? Have you returned—from wherever you were—to ask me foolish questions? Why this most unusual interest in my concerns?"

"Gladys, for God's sake tell me all about it. This fellow tried to——"

"Stop. Don't say anything against Mr. Ingram. Mr. Ingram is one of the people who remember their obligations, and never shirk them. If I pray to-night, I shall pray God to bless Mr. Ingram."

"Tell me all that has happened."

"Very well. Mr. Ingram and my poor brother left England to-day—for America—and I went to see them off. Do you object to that? Have I committed a solecism—will people laugh at us? . . . Seymour, I am too weary—and too sad—for any discussion. If I have earned your censure, reserve it, please. . . . Poor Schiller is very ill. We have been trying to get him away for months. Once he saved his friend's life; now his friend is trying to save his. They are going to California. That's the best chance—the doctors say. . . . Really, that's all. You never liked poor Schiller—but you can't wish him harm, I suppose. You don't like Mr. Ingram.—Mr. Ingram may not be a good man—but he pays his debts. He is doing a noble and a kind act—we should all pay our debts;" and she began to cry. "Goodnight, Seymour."

The inward light was still shining: his breast melted in tenderness and joy. She is what she has always been—sweet and good and pure. Tears filled his eyes; the overwhelming sense of relief unnerved him. As once before, a year ago, he turned to her with outstretched arms.

"Gladys, my dearest girl."

But she recoiled from him, seemed puzzled by his gesture and his words.

"What is it, Seymour? What has upset you?"

"Gladys, all this has been a dream—you'll never know what I have suffered to-day—but don't doubt my love."

She drew farther from him, and again her face hardened.

"What is the matter, Seymour? Why are you acting—all this affection? Please don't pretend——"

"It's true—no pretence. I want to be with you—to stay with you."

"Why? What's the real reason of your return?"

"To be with you—again—and always."

"With *me?* But why? Have you quarrelled with your mistress—or grown tired of her?"

"Gladys!"

"I am told that all men are the same—you can't bind them. They grow tired—even of their mistresses. But you must get another—you'll do that easily—only don't choose your mistress from among my friends. But you can't do that this time—because I have no friends left."

"Gladys!"

He had forgotten that she knew: he had forgotten all about Irene. Since six o'clock he had been played upon by rapidly succeeding emotions. For the last two hours he had been stretched on a rack—broken on wheels of red-hot thought. He had been given over to the furies—he had been thrown down from high cliffs, dragged through suffocating sulphurous chasms, nearly drowned in deep and bitter waters. Tormented, one thinks of the torment. No one can think of everything at once. He had forgotten Irene.

"Goodnight, Seymour. . . . No, don't touch me. Don't dare to do that."

"Gladys. I'll listen to all reproaches. I don't mean to defend myself."

"But I have no reproaches to make. I haven't put you on your defence."

"Don't say that. I have been weak, and——"

"Say you have been like other men. Say I had common vulgar notions when I expected you to be different."

"You must give me a chance to show——"

"To show you can still surprise me, by your gallantry and success."

"That's heartless—very heartless. Don't speak as if you had no heart."

"If it's true—whose fault? It *is* true—I have no heart now. You have frozen it—torn it out—and trampled on it."

"Gladys, I know I have treated you cruelly. But you mustn't say it's too late to——"

"I do say it. Yes, it has come to this—I wish I had died before I saw you—heard your name—and——"

"Gladys, don't—don't go on. I know I have been weak."

"Yes, but your weakness is deadly—it is worse than other men's crimes—it degrades and then kills."

He thought of the other woman—raving, blubbering, writhing,—and compared her with this woman. The manifestation of his wife's resentment was terrible to him, after the spluttering fires and smoky flashings of Irene's tantrums. A steel-cold glitter of just wrath came from her, with a radiating glow of scorn for the delinquent and his delinquencies. Her voice was clear and low, and yet full of passion; her whole frame was tremulous with passion, and yet she herself was firm and straight and strong. Her words were a swift two-edged sword, turning, and playing, and cutting.

"Let me go now, Seymour. We shan't gain by talking any more to-night."

"I implore you to hear me—I can't sleep till I have——"

"Yes, sleep on it. You 'll be wiser—more yourself to-morrow."

"No, you must hear me—Nothing you can say is worse than I deserve. But I tell you, all that is over and done with. I look back on it with sorrow and remorse. No woman exists for me now—except you."

"Then my guess was right. You are in want of a new——"

"I want you—and no one else. You may trust me now—I'll be true till death."

"Don't make promises, Seymour."

"They'll stand any test—now."

"I shan't test them."

"Yes—I'll prove the remorse and the—the regret."

The outburst of her passion had passed. She looked at him thoughtfully, and spoke in hard matter-of-fact tones.

"You can't consider it very strange if I don't take your remorse too seriously. I hope—I believe you'll get over it—

and feel quite all right again. But as to me—well, you may rely on this: I won't trouble you, or interfere with you, or ever complain of you. You won't ask for more than that."

"Yes, I do. I ask for the old love. I ask you to give me another chance."

"Please explain what you mean exactly by these other chances."

"I mean that I want you to pardon me—to take me as your husband.—I want you to be my wife again."

"Is that it? I am to fill the vacant place—while you look about you. No. That I cannot do. That I will not do."

Her blonde hair was soft and smooth as spun silk, her pale face was like delicate and most fragile porcelain; but she herself was granite—unyielding, unbending. He vowed and prayed; he desperately pleaded for kindness, gentleness, and forgiveness; and she neither relented nor forgave. If, in his silent workroom, he had prayed to Marlow's busts, striven to bring friendly glances into stone eyes, and gain kind words from stone lips, he would have been as successful.

"Gladys, you can't conceive what I have passed through—if you could read my thoughts now."

"I *can* read them. Such thoughts as yours are easy to read." And again he felt the radiating scorn. "Fear of scandal—dread of public opinion—horror of what friends say of us—advisability of making some sort of terms at once—and not be worried in the future. Above all, avoid an open breach. Far pleasanter and easier, if we can settle down as the husband who needn't love and the wife who doesn't mind. Those are your real thoughts—though perhaps you don't recognize them."

"No, no—I care nothing for the world now—I only care for you."

"Then these are *my* thoughts. You have allowed me freedom for quiet meditation—and I knew that we must have this explanation and argument some time. But I hoped we should do it all by letters—calmly and quietly—like people of the world. I thought *you* would not wish—must be saved from this sort of *scene*. I decided long ago what the terms of our arrangement would be, in the end."

"Tell me what you decided."

"That I'll go on acting the part you have allotted to me—if you wish it. You have shown me exactly how much and how little you think I can help you. You should never have married me—you feel it has jeopardized your career. But you made the mistake—now the mistake must not spoil your career. Your career is everything, isn't it? I am thinking for *you*. You daren't face scandal, even talk—there can be no breath-stain on the mirror of your fame. I am your wife; you don't want me; but you daren't put me away. That's true, isn't it? So far as that, I am necessary to your plans. I am here—the fatal encumbrance. I must stay here, or I wreck your career."

"You must stay here, or you wreck my life."

"Very well. I'll do that—to pay my debt. I owe you something—I'll pay the debt. I'll help you to keep up appearances, as long as you please."

"You owe me nothing. But give me—give me more help than that."

"Or, if you please, you can obtain a divorce. You'll know what you have to do—desertion—blows—or whatever *more* the law requires. I'll help you in that also, if you change your mind—or meet some woman who drives harder bargains than the last."

"Gladys—you are very cruel."

"Am I? But I am not meaning to be cruel. On my honor, I am thinking for *you* now."

"You only remember your own wrongs."

"You see, I have thought it all out. Seymour, on my honor, I have remembered what I owe to you—and what you said to me at Dykefield. Do *you* remember all you said? You were kind to me once.—That's true—you were kind when you married me. You've been kind to my father—and you were very kind when—I had a great grief."

"It was my grief, too. It was our grief."

She moved towards him, took his hand, and held it in hers for a few moments.

"Seymour, I oughtn't to have told you not to touch me.

You must forgive me for saying that. I shouldn't have said it, if I had thought."

He would have drawn her closer to him; but she dropped his hand, and stepped back.

"I am grateful, Seymour, for your money too. I have spent your money. I have been spending your money on my poor brother—all that you have given me. . . . Dykefield is yours, of course—but I have spent all the money that has come from it. There—these things add up my debt to you, Seymour. And if I do what I offer, I shall think I have paid the debt in full."

"You spoke of driving hard bargains—but you are making cruelly hard terms yourself."

"Those are the terms, Seymour. I'll live with you as your wife—in public only. Or I'll leave you for ever. Which is is to be?"

"You must never leave me."

"That means, you agree to the terms?"

She was strong, and not weak. At every crisis of their joint lives, this was his discovery—a fact ignored, then forgotten, then confronting him again.

"But Gladys, you'll let me hope to regain your love."

"Goodnight, Seymour."

"Time shall plead for me. I'll hope—I'll go on hoping."

"Don't hope for impossibilities."

"But Gladys, just say this—only this. Tell me I may try to win you back."

"You may try—but you won't succeed."

XXXIX

HE had lost her as completely as if she had gone from him. They lived under the same roof, talked to each other with courtesy publicly and privately; but they were husband and wife only in name. They separated for days, weeks, or months, and, meeting again, told each other their experiences,

made amicable inquiries as to future plans, in a quiet methodical manner discussed all arrangements that affected both of them.

As announced by fashionable intelligencers, Lady Brentwood is spending the autumn on the Yorkshire moors—"Dykefield Castle is quite a show place, of considerable historic interest, to which the existing mansion house was added in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign. . . . " Lord Brentwood has gone to Norway, where he has taken an extensive fishing. Lord and Lady Brentwood will be in residence at Collingbourne Court—"one of the most beautiful woodland demesnes of southern England"—during the month of November, and will entertain a series of shooting-parties. It is expected that Lord and Lady Brentwood will return to Andover House shortly, and be among those passing Christmas in London.

These facts, known to Fashionable Intelligence, proved how well external appearances had been maintained. Of secret bargain and treaty between high contracting powers, Fashionable Intelligence must be mute, even had it guessed the true state of affairs. It did not remotely guess; but, fully guessing, would not have been shocked. Rather would it have applauded. So much better—in these horrid socialistic times—not to wash coroneted linen where vulgar passers-by can peep into the wash-tub! This noble couple, finding themselves two, and not one, keep the knowledge to themselves. They are like that Lord and Lady Wellingborough cited by Emily Charlton—like a dozen other detached pairs to be cited by anyone who is fortunate enough to move habitually in the best society,—like half the polite world perhaps—quite of the modern style.

There had been no breath of scandal—that is the grand thing. Only old-fashioned unintelligent Lady Emily is painfully aware that her brother has made an abominable hash of his married life, and deplores and laments an ugly mess, be it never so well concealed. Lady Emily, ready to wear sack-cloth about her lean back and put ashes on her gray hair, could not sufficiently upbraid herself for hasty and ill-founded doubt of a sister-in-law's honor and virtue. With abject humbleness, she will apologize to her brother for putting a

maladroit spinster finger in his domestic pie. She has always loved dear Gladys, admired her, respected her—Yet, if anyone will candidly consider the perplexing web of circumstances, the suddenness and seeming plainness of linked facts, surely poor old Emily may be forgiven? There was nothing in it—just when there appeared to be so dreadfully much. That objectionable person innocently, indeed praiseworthily, buying steamboat tickets and removing himself and his very objectionable reputation out of our ken, let us hope finally—why speak of our mistake again? Why cannot dear Seymour rejoice and be happy ever after? Lord Brentwood, somnolent, and neglectful of duty, has been stirred into active care; dear Gladys is good as gold;—there can be no real reason why they should not re-establish themselves as an ideally old-fashioned, conventional married couple. And yet—as Emily perceives when she visits them this autumn at Collingbourne Court—they are precisely in the situation of Lord and Lady Wellingborough: they have drifted as far apart as the north and south poles.

Truly Lord Brentwood, in a worldly point of view, might be congratulated on a very fortunate extrication from a perilous entanglement. Irene had been dispersed, sent into shadowland. Robbed of potency and poisonous spells, she was something to be remembered only as a healthy man recalls, with increasing dimness, the hospital ward, night terrors, or the delusions of high fever. Absolutely no scandal—the offender gets off scot-free. Aunt Yates and Lady Edward refrain from spreading foolish tales; never so faint a whisper reaches Mr. and Mrs. Malcomson, to arouse a tardy suspicion of the truth. Whispering, in fact, has ceased. Or irrepressible whisperers are busy with other matters.— If Irene's name is connected with anybody now it is not with Lord Brentwood. "We seem to have been on the wrong track, my dear—don't you know, what we used to say about Seymour B. and a certain young lady." Autumnal guests at the Darmstadt, if they watch and whisper on the hunt for scandal, can soon find again, and get away this time with a breast-high scent.

Thus Lord Brentwood may forget his indiscretion, need

bear no marks of his slavery in the enchanted prison. He regained freedom with surprising ease—so slight an effort required, but he could not make it till chance came to his aid. A few frenzied letters from Irene—unanswered,—then silence. A splutter of red flame, some angry sparks flying, and then darkness—his enchantress has been blown away by the night wind, like smoke from the speeding train, has mingled with the dusky void and been left behind one. A regrettable episode, to be forgotten—without consequences. Nothing now to remind him except this, that he has lost his wife.

But the loss made him miserable.

He was awakened at last—more and more light coming to him, as he struggled upward from the depths of his rubbish heap. He felt the crushing weight of self-imposed burdens, was frantically throwing them off, was striving to gain more light; but the light showed him his misery. If ever he should get out into the strong unimpeded light, he would stand alone in a barren empty space.

Fishing, hunting, shooting—at work or at play,—he thought of his great loss. Gladys was real; all else was futile. Without her, nothing was left. Houses of Parliament crumbled into dust; privy councils, board meetings, and all congregations of specially dressed actors, became tedious, mouthing ghosts; gold-laced coats and ermine robes, or leather breeches and top-boots, or mackintosh capes and waders, faded and tarnished, were eaten of moth, turned into grave clothes, if one tried to think of them. Nothing but his wife mattered; and he had lost her.

She was the only woman in the world for him. She alone could save him from himself, and raise him and give him strength. He loved her and he yearned for her. He was steadily working back to his state of mind at their first meeting, when, doubting and disillusioned, he fancied that he heard a message in her song. Again unutterable sickness of his life returned; and with the old insupportable weariness, there came again the old longing for love and help. He thought over this three years as a stupid inconsecutive dream. Was it possi-

ble that a man could be given so much and do so little? He had created nothing with all the materials in his power; he had not even made order in the materials, for other hands to work upon them. Wealth almost unlimited had been his, and he could only spend it foolishly. What worse thing can be said of any rich man? He had not been methodically good, or intentionally bad: he had been simply futile. Looking backward for any monument or vestiges of his squandered wealth, he could see nothing but well-covered dinner tables—truly, there was nothing behind him but dinners or suppers. When he was poor, it had often been difficult to pay for costly dinners; when he was rich, there had been no difficulty. He had given many dinners, and that was the biggest thing he had done with all his wealth.

The accession to fortune had been calamitous to him. If the money had not come, he would have been a happy and contented man with the woman he loved. He had stripped himself of gaudy nonsense and encumbering ornament: he had fortified himself with a new determination: he was ready for the good fight. And in a moment—at the sight of some bags of gold, at the sound of some flattering words—his strength had turned again to weakness, his vows were as if they had been written in water on dry sand. If he had been strong, the money could not have destroyed him. He would have used it, or disregarded it: but it could not have changed him, even if it changed the outward aspect of his life.

And he thought of what Gladys should have been to him, rich or poor. If he was weak, she was strong. He could see the nobleness of her character now.

Self-taught and self-dependent, she had mastered the greatest of life-mysteries: she knew unerringly what is real and what is false. She dealt only in essentials: for her, love and kindness and truth made up the foundations of existence. In any real work, she would have helped him: she had failed only when you placed her among the futilities. She was real, neither saw nor dreaded the moving shadows; and, walking *through* them, seemed to trip and blunder because she kept no step or time with their fantastic shadow-dance. If his

career had been real, she of all women would have pushed him forward, supported, and guided him. But she was useless—because of her strength and nobility—when you asked her to help you with meaningless forms, unsubstantial labors, sham sentiments, empty phrases, and false pretensions.

Had ever a man such a treasure—was ever treasure so wasted? Fate had played a diabolical trick with him in offering him the two things—wife or world—and making him choose the wrong one.

Wife, and companion—he longed for the old companionship, the open and unchecked communion of spirit, the friendly chatter springing from the half-born ideas, the friendly silences when each is beating out the same thoughts. He pined for her love, he needed her sympathy; a dreadful loneliness surrounded him in his own house. She was there, within sight, and he was more lonely than if she had been thousands of miles away.

Some sort of companionship she gave him freely. She smiled at him amicably; she listened to all he said; she showed interest in all subjects of ordinary conversation. It was as if they had been partners conducting a monotonous business, or two clerks in a public department who had agreed for convenience to share lodgings together. She gave him what he might have looked for in the past from a fellow collegiate or a brother officer.

"I hope you have had good sport to-day, Seymour," she would say politely; or "I am afraid the rain was troublesome to you all the afternoon;" or "The vicar came again, Seymour. He wants to see you about the addition to the Parish room."

Villagers and cottage people round Collingbourne sometimes saw my lord and my lady walking side by side, and thought them very good companions—the best of all companions: a thoroughly united husband and wife. Her ladyship took the greatest possible interest in landlord's improvements, district nurses, parish rooms—and, above all, in his lordship's new model cottages. She would go with him,

whenever he asked her, to watch the progress of his builder's work. She would stand in the rain or the wind as long as he wished; she would climb ladders to look at bedrooms on the upper floor, or dive into floorless kitchens to see the commodious larders and outhouses.

"I think they'll be lovely cottages when they are finished, Seymour. And I think it is very kind of you to build them."

If, for her part, she desired to call upon some recipient of bounty from the Court, he was pleased to accompany her, and, bowing his head, would follow her into the humblest and most ancient cottage on the estate.

The vicar, going his rounds, came upon them sitting together in an old crone's low-ceiled parlor, and was deeply impressed. A charming sight for the vicar,—a little matter to be reported with satisfaction to Mrs. Vicar,—really a gratifying example set to all of us by our friends at the Court. So great, so grand, so eminently aristocratic, and yet quite unspoilt by the world: a happy pair of wedded lovers still, simply and unostentatiously doing good, hand in hand. "Is it not refreshing, my dear," said the vicar, "when one meets unadulterated humanity allied with the highest rank?"

After their call upon this rheumatic old tenant, the landlord and his lady walked back across the fields, between the down and the woods, to their splendid loveless home. The sun was sinking in yellow mist; by the edge of a beech copse the grass was strewn with brown leaves; it was a pleasant autumn evening—but there was deadness, sadness in the air, something cold in the brightness, nature's lament for the greater warmth and richer color that have gone. They talked of the landscape, the sunset, and the chances for and against a fine day tomorrow.

"Gladys, I hope your boots are thick enough. This grass is very wet."

"Oh, yes. I have good stout boots—but if you think we had better go by the road——"

"Oh, no. This is much nicer, if you are sure——"

"Yes, and I shall change my boots."

She was dressed in brown—rough serge skirt and jacket,

tawny-hued necktie, russet hat and pheasant's feather,—and it seemed to him that she might have dressed thus to appear in a masque of Autumn. She was like this cool bright autumn day: pleasant and kind; but all that makes the glory of summer had gone.

They passed through a line of gates, and at a gate near the parklands he pointed to the quickset hedge.

"That was the first fence I ever jumped—one morning, cubbing,—on a cob that we called Harlequin—because Collingbourne said he went in and out, and never clean over."

She was quite interested in his juvenile exploits.

"Then you were always fond of riding, Seymour? You ride so well—they all tell me that."

He held the gate for her, and looked at her as she passed through. The walk had brought color to her face; her eyes were bright; her expression was full of friendly interest: outwardly she was his own Gladys.

"Thank you, Seymour," and her glance seemed soft and kind.

Yet if he tried to soften her, she changed again to stone.

Returning late from a long day with hounds, he was pleased to learn that she had wondered if some mishap might have befallen him.

"You *are* unusually late, aren't you, Seymour? The others came home hours ago."

He told her that all was well with him. They had killed a fox in somebodys else's country—a really good run to wind up a wretched bad day—and then, eighteen miles to jog along the roads.

"Oh, what a long ride! But you are none the worse for it. Not cold or tired?"

He was pleased to think that his absence had made her anxious, that she had missed him, that she felt glad to see him safe and sound.

"You were not riding one horse all day?"

"Oh, no—but my second horse had the work to do."

"How tired he must be. Eighteen miles! Poor horse—he

must be happy to get back to his comfortable stable after such a day."

She cared for him no more than for his horse. She gave him the kindness and consideration that she was ready to bestow on friends, guests, servants, the horses in the stables, the cows in the meadows. She was kind—and when she noticed his unusual absence, she hoped that he had not broken his neck. He thanked her for her kind anxiety.

Her love seemed gone for ever—and her love was what he wanted. But more and more light was coming to him. This thing is essential: this is what he must fight for. And his resolution, wavering for a moment, gathered vigor. He must win her back. So far he has tried hard, but failed. Well he must go on trying.

He must woo her from the beginning once again. The work is not a patching up, a wiping out, or a rebuilding: it is a new task, a fresh start.

XL

BEGINNING in August, and continuing without remission, there had been dreadful trouble at the house in the Bayswater Road. The trouble or its cause is now, as in the past, the unmarried daughter of the house, Irene.

The trouble bursts upon her parents suddenly and inexplicably. Irene has lived down all slanderous reports; she has been pampered and made much of in select circles of rank and fashion; she is gay, light-hearted, full of bounce and impudence. That is Irene on an August morning, just off for a happy week-end by the river. Irene is a haggard, death-like witch, moving with slow tragic mein, sunk into bottomless pits of dejection. That is Irene on an August afternoon, just returned from her holiday. What has happened? Devastating, peace-breaking phenomenon, not to be explained—apparently, like nearly everything connected with Irene, outside ordinary law variation from standardized experience, abnormal. Mr.

and Mrs. Malcomson guess and guess, make wild shots that hit no targets. All they distressfully know is this: they are in for trouble again.

It is the old story—Irene howling behind locked doors, raving in anger, or contorting herself in tears, quarrelling with Papa, rendering him frantic; nagging at Mamma, prostrating her on sofas till heart attacks pass over. Doctors say nerves—really nothing but nerves,—and Irene says doctors are fools, never have understood her, never will understand her. Healthy exercise, a quiet orderly humdrum life, are prescribed: relatives and servants should assist in carrying out doctors' prescriptions. The Bayswater household has been whirled back into the turmoil and apprehensive worry of five years ago, when Irene first asked Papa to let her go to the devil in her own way.

Irene asked now to be allowed to go. She swore that if they imprisoned her at home in Bayswater, she would become insane. "I can't stand it. Let me go and live by myself—and I promise I'll never bother you again."

Mr. Malcomson frantically bellowed, forbade his daughter to speak of leaving the parental roof.

"You must be insane already."

"Father, it's no use bullying and roaring. I can't and won't bear it. Give me what allowance you please, or give me nothing at all—but let me go without a fuss. I won't ask you for money."

"Then where do you think you'll get money?"

"That's my business—I'll manage somehow. I'll write for the newspapers, teach music, or start a bonnet shop. You talk as if unmarried girls never lived alone nowadays." And she gave instances of numerous young spinsters of her acquaintance who possessed flats or houses of their own. She would not outrage even Bayswater's strict code of conventions. She would place herself under the wing of a chaperon. Well-born, agreeable Miss Haines-Cole would gladly join forces with her; they could find some cheap little house, and share the inconsiderable expenses.

These entreaties or threats had a disastrous effect on invalided Mrs. Malcomson. The idea of Irene's desertion

induced cardiac syncope and bed for three days. The wretched father was compelled to cease bellowing and to sue for mercy.

"Do you wish to kill your mother? If you persist in your wicked, selfish desire, you will be the death of her. You are practically independent here—you shall not be thwarted in any reasonable schemes. What more do you want? What have you to gain?"

"Freedom," said Irene. "Freedom of the mind, as well as the body. The intellectual atmosphere of this house stifles me—if I stay, I can't answer for myself. Some night I shall jump out of my bedroom window. Let me go quietly—if only to save a mess on the pavement, and a fuss in the newspapers."

Irene persisted, in spite of Papa's prayers and Mamma's palpitations. She and Miss Haines-Cole had found their little house—only a bandbox, yet big enough for them—and well situated,—in Curzon Street, Mayfair. But rents in Mayfair—even of bandboxes—are prodigious. What is the rent? Oh, hang the rent—Miss Cole will pay all the rent, if a miserly millionaire father will not pay Irene's half of it. But how can Miss Cole afford to be so generous? Miss Cole has come into money—"I have told you so again and again." Well-connected Miss Cole has recently been bereft of an ancient patrician cousin. Death has shaken her family tree, and given Miss Cole a handsome windfall. But what was the name of Miss Haines-Cole's cousin? Why, Cole of course—or Haines. "I forget which—that is, I didn't ask her. I took it for granted it was one or the other."

"Irene—for your mother's sake, stop with us."

"Father, I am going. You had better give me your permission. Then none of these fossilized idiots will talk, or bother Mamma with questions."

Irene went, without permission, and the trouble grew deeper. Mrs. Malcomson spends a fortnight in bed, says her fat-sheathed heart is broken: she will never get over it. Mr. and Mrs. Malcomson offer no explanations to the curious—friends may draw their own conclusions.

Some time, then, during this drab-toned autumn, Irene vanishes amidst Bayswater fog, and emerges in her charmingly upholstered, newly-wired, well-lit Mayfair bandbox. It is a fair-sized bandbox—with space for several hats. These two clever young women have perhaps picked up a bargain, and bought the short end of a lease, at low ground rent, premium-less. What they save in rent, they can spend on decoration. A. W. Copland has done up the house for them: so tastefully that one might fancy his order had been a carte blanche. That, no doubt, is Mr. Copland's art—seeming regardless of cost, when cutting things down with rigid economy.

But he has certainly repeated some of his Darmstadt successes—wonderful bath-room, old English boudoir, two ultra-French drawing-rooms—on a small scale. Does all this need further explanation? People may think what they please.

Irene drives about in a chocolate-colored brougham on cee-springs and spider wheels—a sober little equipage, and yet it catches the eye. One can't help noticing it—and Irene's new sable cloak, real Russian sables, down to her heels. When she gets out of her brougham and enters a Bond Street fur store, even her furrier marvels. He has nothing so good in his stock—could not match it, if madam honored him with a commission. But Irene requires no more sable: she is looking for some ermine. Madam haughtily declines to give a reference; she has not demanded credit; she will pay cash for anything she buys. If inquisitive friends should hear of these prompt cash payments, and wonder how it is all done by a young lady who has quarrelled with Papa and her natural source of supply—well, they must draw their own conclusions.

In Darmstadt Restaurant coteries there is again much whispering. A name is unreservedly mentioned, is assiduously connected with the name of Miss Malcomson. She has been seen occasionally with rich Sir Gregory. A glimpse, but sufficient for the flashy scandal-hunting pack—dogs and little ladies mixed,—who flashily lift their heads, always eager to spring from scent to view. Some one sees Irene and Sir Gregory shopping together—at the Times Book Club, getting French novels; or at the Army and Navy Co-operative Asso-

ciation, selecting Christmas presents. Someone else sees them at the theatre—in a private box,—first night of a new problem play. Yes, that is Miss Malcomson, sitting well forward—but is there no one behind her? Surely more in this big box than meets the eye!

"My dear, I saw him.—Of course—Sir Gregory. He leaned forward to pick up her programme, and I saw his red face distinctly."

In Bayswater the trouble grows still deeper. After Christmas—the first Malcomson Christmas devoid of all attempt at patriarchal family gathering and seasonal gaieties—the trouble is almost unbearable. This new episode cannot pass so propitiously as the last. This time, old Malcomson quickly suspects, is soon confirmed in his suspicions. Partner Dulake has tackled him—Cannot concerted measures be adopted, if Mr. Malcomson feels unable, single-handed, to cope with his trouble? The banking-house collectively is suffering under the trouble, will consider itself dishonored if it bear such things tamely. Dulake's own wife and daughter, and his niece, wife of Tom, may be diminished in public esteem, if we take no steps to avert a continuance of the trouble. No doubt, too, young Tom has told his father what is being said in counting house, clerks' rooms, and at City luncheon tables.

"But what can I do, Tom? The disgrace—if she knows of it—will kill your mother. I have tried to get Irene away. I have done all I can. She defies me."

One foggy night, after a gloomy untasted dinner, old Malcomson snatched his hat and stick, shouted for a cab, and drove across to Knightsbridge, to wait upon his sometime friend. Sir Gregory was at home, and a violent altercation ensued in the octagon hall. Mr. Waller and servants saw and heard it all. The furious old man called Sir Gregory a blackguard and a thief, and would have fallen upon Sir Gregory and beaten Sir Gregory with the stick, had not Waller, butler, and footman withheld him.

Sir Gregory only laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and said gray hairs had saved Mr. Malcomson from a thrashing. Exhausted by his abortive violence, shaking and gasping, but

still insulting and threatening, Mr. Malcomson was conducted to his cab and sent home again to Bayswater.

"Tell him," said Sir Gregory, and he called after Waller and the others,—"tell the old fool to keep out of my road, and I'll keep out of his."

They met no more. The quarrel was known now to all business associates, who henceforth could guard against untoward encounters between avowed enemies. But Mr. Malcomson must calm himself; he must understand that private grievances may not be introduced among business affairs. The large interests at stake ordain discretion and self-control. We cannot have our shareholders perturbed by directors' wranglings. It was perhaps fortunate that Sir Gregory had retired from the board of the Amalgamated Hotels. He came to the offices in St. James's Street only when, agreeably to his promise, he gave Waller valuable advice as to the intricacies of finance or the dexterities of management. There would be no difficulty in arranging that he should not be asked to come at a time when Malcolmson might be sitting in the board-room.

The doctors declared it was the long and severe frost that killed Mrs. Malcomson, but the grief-stricken widower said it was Irene.

"Don't let that woman come to the funeral."

"But, Papa, it will seem so *odd* if she is not there—her own mother? And, besides, how can we prevent her coming?"

"Write to her and say she knows she has broken her mother's heart—and she shall not come to exult over her work. Do as I bid you."

The two married daughters had arrived at Bayswater, and were staying with Papa in the black days of bereavement. They had been a long time absent; but they recollected Bayswater ways, and they thought Bayswater would have less to talk about if every member of the family appeared in the funeral cortege. Nevertheless, they obeyed their sorrowing patriarch, and one of them dutifully wrote to Curzon Street, conveying the message. No wreath or cross could be accepted

from Irene. Nor must she dare to show her face in Highgate Cemetery.

The bitter east wind swept over the northern heights, blowing away the words of the funeral service, cutting the eyes of the most stoical mourners until tears fell from them. There were two coaches full of flowers, and twenty coaches full of relatives and friends. Round the open vault stood the chief mourners—Tom and his two brothers, the married daughters, the patriarch's nearest and dearest;—behind these came Dulakes, Tilneys, Adamses, etc., business connections, if not blood-allies. Amidst these solemn men, one could talk freely —the wind carried away all words, sacred or profane. "The old boy's awf'ly cut up—by his looks." "Yes—feels his sheet anchor's gone." "Seems dazed, doesn't he?" "It's put ten years on to his shoulders." "He won't last now—you mark my words." No words were marked—the wind blew them away. Behind this second ring of mourners, stood representatives of the Lombard Street staff, servants, Bayswater tradesmen. And outside the widest ring, behind mere loafers, stood Irene.

She was becomingly dressed in black, with an ermine toque and stole; and a big bunch of parma violets, which she held against her face—perhaps to hide her face, or perhaps to shield it from the nipping blast. She stepped back among the pompous tombs, when presently mourners moved, and her father came down the path towards her. He passed quite close, but did not see her.

He was leaning on his son's arm, and Tom was telling him to put on his hat. His gray hair had been swept over his frowning forehead; his eyes were blood-shot; his jowl was twitching convulsively: he looked old, broken, half dead. He could see no faces—unless, perhaps, the face of the wife whom he bullied and loved for forty years.

When he had passed, Irene mounted the boards by the open grave—really like an accomplished actress taking the stage, in a moment dominating the scene, holding a quickly focussed attention. With a slow graceful gesture, she dropped the violets into the grave; still gazing at the grave, drew herself

away into the unobserved ranks of supernumeraries. Then she hastened to the nearest gate, and drove off in her chocolate-colored brougham.

When Sir Gregory came to tea in Curzon Street—and he came nearly every day,—Irene always welcomed him graciously, and seemed pleased to hear his ponderous, deliberate footstep on the parquetry floor of her French drawing-room. Sometimes Irene was nervy and jumpy, and a tiff broke out over the teaboard; but for the most part they appeared to be excellent good friends, with a thorough understanding between them, and esteeming each other at a proper value. Certainly, Miss Irene knew by now almost all that there was to be known about her friend. He might and did tell her vaingloriously of his adventurous career, and she was content to listen submissively. She never rudely interrupted: she gave him now no flashing insolence or haughtily abrupt contempt. She was not apparently shocked by his autobiographical revelations; his tales of scooping the pool, squeezing people dry, smashing rivals as a precautionary step before they had time to smash him—none of these early chapters of his life made her turn in visible horror from the opened page, even if she comprehended clearly enough that the life-book was the history of a successful rogue. She called him her pirate chief.

"What has my pirate chief been doing to-day?" she would smilingly inquire. "How many galleons has he overtaken—how many poor wretches have been forced to walk the plank?"

"Pirate chief!" echoed Sir Gregory, when he heard his name for the first time. "What d'you mean by that?" And Irene explained that she meant a compliment to his daring and his prowess.

Sir Gregory chuckled complacently. He liked the name. "Yes, you may call me that. . . . I've never failed for want of courage, or from too much respect for law and order—eh? That's it—eh? Well, I told you, fair lady, that I always succeeded in anything I set my heart on," and he favored her with a by no means pretty look. "I've always got what I wanted, in the end."

Once or twice, the harmony of the tea hour was disturbed, and tiffs and tantrums were caused, by direct references or veiled allusions to that well-known nobleman, Lord Brentwood.

Irene spoke of him respectfully and admiringly, and Sir Gregory spoke of him disparagingly and coarsely. Then sharp words were spoken on both sides, and Irene exploded in tantrums. But perhaps Irene had found her master—her pirate was not to be frightened by a storm in a tea-cup.

"You are jealous," said Irene; "and that makes you unjust. You know very well that you have no cause, but your jealousy has made you hate him."

"*You* have made me hate him. I tell you, I don't want to be reminded of his existence. I never want to see him or hear of him again."

"Don't be angry."

"Then don't remind me. I had to bottle my anger long enough—I nearly burst sometimes when I had to be civil—grinning and kow-towing—and I thought he was going off to meet *you*."

On another occasion Irene, whose nerves were perhaps unusually troublesome, wilfully braved the displeasure of her kind friend. Irene was sitting at the tea-table, and Sir Gregory was standing with his back to the fire.

"What's that thing over there?" he asked—"that miniature;" and he pointed to her pretty escritoire.

"That's a portrait of Seymour Brentwood," said Irene; and she fetched the golden, jewelled trinket, and sat down again to admire the encased picture.

"Where did you get it?"

"It's a reduction of a photograph. I had it made at De Vaal's studio."

"And the frame? That cost a tidy bit—I'll bet," and Sir Gregory scowled at her. "Let me look at it."

"It's too small to show the true expression," said Irene, perversely admiring. "But the beautifully chiselled features are here—the lofty, well-bred air—the face of a king—proud and aloof—above the common herd."

"Give it to me." And Irene surrendered the picture.

"If he ever grew a beard, he'd be like Charles the First—painted by Vandyke."

"Oh, go on. Don't mind me," and Sir Gregory, with the picture in his hand, stood scowling at her. And perhaps Irene compared him with the other man—looking at the sandy wisps of hair across the bald forehead, the puffy red cheeks, the grossness and clumsiness of his whole frame, thought of the beauty, the refinement, and the dignity of the other. Or perhaps jumpiness to-day made her merely wilful. She went on praising Lord Brentwood.

"That's enough—more than enough—about this damned thing."

"Then put it back in its place," said Irene, imperiously pointing to her escritoire.

"I'll show you its place," and Sir Gregory pitched the miniature into the fire, took up the poker, and crushed it down behind the bars of the grate.

"You beast," howled Irene. "You utter beast and brute—you——"

"Stop that," said Sir Gregory, giving her a very ugly look indeed. "No nonsense. I'll have no hankerings after that popinjay of yours. I have told you he is to be forgotten. And I tell you I'll be obeyed, my girl."

She had perhaps found her master. For the first time, she had met someone who opposed tea-tray tempests with a brutal, impassive strength. When she sent forth her vibrating waves of excitement, they came rolling back upon her, changed into waves of fear. More than once, when she made her pirate angry, she recognized in her own sensations something quite new, and therefore something that should have pleased her as an indefatigable sensation-seeker. It was a feeling of sudden emptiness, with a cold shiver running round the unexpected vacuum; and she knew that it would be classed by materialistic philosophers as craven physical fear. It was new, but it did not please her at all.

If, with his interminable reminiscences, Sir Gregory bored

her to the verge of tears, she could not safely permit herself the slightest indication of ennui. She must supppress yawns, maintain the light in violet eyes, keep a smile playing about red lips. The prolix master wished to see, across the tea table, an animated expression on an attentive face.

But one cold February afternoon, Sir Gregory, warming his broad back at the fire, and prosing about his youth and success, really interested Irene. Sir Gregory, who possessed this faculty of inspiring fear, surprised her by confessing that he himself was not exempt from fear.

"I gas about having plenty of pluck—but it's all early training. When I was a nipper, I was regularly entered to fight the world—just as if I had been a young game-cock put down into a ring. I knew that if I funked, I was done for. But I couldn't escape the 'funks,' as we kids called it. We all have our weak spots—and fear found out mine. Since then, I know my limits—though this is a fair boast: I've never been afraid of anything above ground."

"But that means you are afraid of nothing."

"Show me a live man, and I'm ready for him! It's the dead men I'm afraid of."

"Dead men? Ghosts?"

Sir Gregory chuckled jovially. "I'll tell you, if you like. It was when I was a little nipper of ten,"—and he told her a queer rambling story of how he and other children used to play at night in a graveyard near his native slum. One night, when he tried to climb out of the graveyard over a wall, fear seized him. He thought the dead men had come out of their graves to chase and catch him. He hung on the wall, screaming in terror, certain that the dead men had got him by the heels and were dragging him down.

"I like that," said Irene. "Go on."

"It's Gospel truth. My first acquaintance with fear."

"I didn't know you had so much imagination," said Irene; and her eyes sparkled quite naturally. "Go on. I like it."

Spurred by these compliments, Sir Gregory expanded the tale, gave fine details of his horror. He described the feeling of the dead men's hands, bony fingers clutching and pinching,

pulling him from the wall, to drag him down into the rotting graves.

"Yes, yes—go on. I like it."

"I could feel their stinking breath—I could hear their earth-clogged voices—'Yes, my lad, you're brave enough up there among the live men; now come down and fight it out among the dead men. . . .'"

"Go on. You're telling it splendidly."

"I screamed and struggled—tore my nails, barked my shins, but couldn't escape from them. It was just deadly, blood-curdling fear—it has haunted me ever since. It comes back to me in dreams, and I wake struggling and fighting with the bed-clothes—the grave clothes—the—the—the cursed dead men. I feel . . ."

"What is it? What's the matter with you?"

He had told his story so well that he seemed to have frightened himself, if not Irene. He moved from the fire, and sat beside her on the sofa. He was breathing heavily; his forehead was wet with perspiration; his hands were shaking.

"It was the illusion—so strong. I'm all right."

"But you don't *look* right," said Irene, with curious interest. "Your face is almost white."

Sir Gregory, puffing and mopping his brow, explained that he had been overcome by the force of the haunting memory.

"It's so strong still—it has lasted a lifetime. Look here—I said it comes back in dreams—I tell you, it has come back in broad daylight, when I was wide awake."

"Yes—yes. Tell me about that."

"I was with my kiddies in Hyde Park—as jolly as a sand-boy—leading my little Lorna's pony,—and I felt it. That stodgy muck they make the ride with tired me—and the drag of it on my feet roused the old memory. I tell you, I felt the grip on my heels—positive real pain,—as if hands had come through the ground and held me. I had to stop and sit down—till I could shake off the illusion."

"My poor old pirate!"

Sir Gregory put his handkerchief in his pocket, and laughed contentedly.

"You didn't know I had such an imagination, eh?"

"No, I didn't. But so strong a man—such a Napoleon of Brigands—shouldn't have *any* illusions. It can," said Irene glibly, "only argue one thing—something wrong in your nerves;" and she looked at him most curiously, with a lively and unacted interest. "Fancy *your* nerves playing tricks!"

Here was something bizarre, fantastic, abnormal, quite to Irene's taste. She was thoroughly interested.

"I wonder what it means. Do let's go out—now—and ask a doctor—some nerve-specialist."

But Sir Gregory laughed at the notion of seeking medical advice.

"I'm all right. I did ask a doctor—Paisley West—a year ago, and he said it was nothing."

"But you may want a tonic—some powerful drug. As to Paisley West—he's an utter fool. There's that other man—Sir Richard Norman,—but he's out of date—convention-bound, fossilized. He never understood *me*. And of course there's old Davidson—he's old, but perhaps he has moved with the times." Irene excitedly went to her escritoire, and turned the leaves of a directory. "I should go to old Davidson, if I were you. Here he is—Morpeth Street. I expect it's strychnine that you want. But there's a new drug—I don't remember what they call it—much more powerful than strychnine. Do let me get my hat and cloak—and let's go and rout out old Davidson. If he won't see us to-night, we'll make an appointment for to-morrow morning. . . . Don't say no. To set *my* mind at rest. You have nothing to do from now to dinner."

Irene, with flattery, cajoleries, and blandishments, prevailed. She made Sir Gregory put on his fur coat; and then and there marched him off to Morpeth Street. Sir Gregory appeared to be pleasantly affected by so much thoughtful care. "Upon my word," he said, chuckling, "I think you are beginning to get fond of me."

"Hurrah!" said Irene, when the servant replied that the doctor would see them. "That *is* luck. . . . The name! Oh yes—Mr. and Mrs. Sturgess."

They waited so long in Doctor Davidson's reception room, that it was difficult for Irene to retain custody of her companion. He grew weary, and would have broken away. But Irene was enjoying herself—no fun possible for Irene if Sir Gregory bolted. She contrived to hold him.

"I am his second wife," she said presently, in the consulting room. "He has an illusion sometimes that really alarms me. Otherwise, he is very strong and well—but I feel that we ought to obtain the very highest advice."

Dr. Davidson was old, kind, sympathetic,—paternal in manner when addressing Irene. He gently hinted that Irene might now withdraw; but Irene preferred to stay in the consulting room.

"Well then—" The doctor examined eyes, tested reflexes, and so on, asking many questions. Mr. Sturgess states that he has worked hard, but he has now retired from all harassing business: he may be considered a man of leisure and of ample means. Mr. Sturgess answers curtly when questioned about his first wife. There were five children by that marriage. There are no children by the second marriage. With a few more questions, Dr. Davidson gets out the fact that Mr. Sturgess has, in his arduous life, relied on ladies' society for amusement after working hours.

Then the doctor again gently hinted that Irene should go into the other room. But Irene was having a morbid treat: she could not allow anyone to cheat her out of it.

"He wishes me to hear your *full* advice. I am alarmed and anxious," and she looked at Sir Gregory imploringly.

"Yes," said Sir Gregory, with a grin. "Fire away—before her."

"Very well then." The kind doctor can find nothing wrong. He makes light of Sir Gregory's nerve-trouble, as described by glib Irene. "You spoke of an illusion, but that is altogether too big a word. Here we have no erroneous perception of the senses—Mr. Sturgess does not for a moment confound mental processes with external facts. As a child he was badly frightened; a recollection of the fright is still distressing. There is nothing unusual in that—We are wonderfully and

curiously made, Mrs. Sturgess. In childhood, while the brain is plastic, impressions register themselves so strongly that the registration may be, so to speak, permanent—ineradicable."

"And association of ideas produces molecular motion, in the cerebral cells," said glib Irene.

The good doctor smiled. "Very well—generally, Mr. Sturgess, I would advise you to spare yourself emotional stress, of all kinds.—No excessive excitements, worryings, or frettings. You have been a hard worker—you should take your rest. . . .

"I do not want to be in the least alarming—I see no cause why I should be. The advice I give you is what I should give to all men of your age, physique, and history—so far as you have told it to me. Such advice is perhaps better addressed to your wife," and he bowed to Irene.

"Save your husband from stress and strain. Encourage him to be contented with life just as it comes. For instance: don't crave for children—should it happen that this blessing is denied. Remember that you are younger than he is,"—and Dr. Davidson seemed to look through Irene at the panelled wall of the room,—"of a more excitable temperament,—with necessity to discharge nerve energy by action,—requiring lively effort of mind and body. All most natural. But I say to you what I would say to any other lady in your circumstances—so far as you have made them known to me. Don't tie your husband to your chariot wheels in every fiery course you run," and he smiled paternally.

"How much?" said Sir Gregory, with jovial brusqueness.

"Two guineas is my fee," said Dr. Davidson coldly.

They went away together in the winter darkness, walking briskly through streets and squares, laughing at the "stuffy old doctor," but easy in their minds now, as Irene said. Sir Gregory was holding her arm in his great fur-covered paw, and he squeezed it with bear-like affection. He held her firmly, with a masterful force that made her arm ache dreadfully before they reached Curzon Street.

"That's right—Forty-two shillings jerked into the gutter to gratify your whim," and he chuckled contentedly. "But you're a good girl—after all. I believe you are getting fond of me."

XLI

FOR more than half a year Seymour had been wooing his wife. It was a resolute, unceasing courtship. He made it the work of his life—neglecting all else. This was essential: nothing else mattered.

He used every art—drew on his past knowledge of women, sought aid from all his memories of the first courtship of this woman. Compassion was a feeling that perhaps more than any other moved her and led her. Her compassion had been his earliest ally. She had begun to love him because she was sorry for him, and thought he was in need of her. Then he must prove to her every day, in a dozen different ways, that she should be sorry for him now.

Sometimes he could see, or fancied he could see, that she was struggling against him, reinforcing herself with proud purpose, obstinately refusing to yield, and yet already perhaps secretly wishing to yield. Carefully he tested his progress, and hope returned. She might say what she pleased—she loved him still. More resolutely than before, he gave himself to his courtship. Light was coming to him, hope was coming to him, and strength was coming to him. Once he had won her; twice he would win her. And he tested his progress again. Failure and darkness—she is as cold as ever.

He spent his thought, his time, his money, to this end only, the winning of her approval. He interested her in charities, persuaded her to go about with him to hospitals, shelters, asylums for youth and age. She liked doing good—he was there to do it for her. All his charitable acts were performed to give her pleasure: a smile was his reward. He was extravagant in his second courtship. Money could not help him directly now, any more than the first time; but it might serve him indirectly. If he gave her costly presents, she would not thank him: so he gave presents to the poor, and she confessed that she was grateful. She had admired his model cottages at Collingbourne: so he sent orders for the building of cottages on all his midland estates. She admired a Convalescent Home

in the western suburbs of London, but thought it a pity that the Institution had not been planted a little farther out, and in the finer air to the north: so he bought land beyond Hampstead, gave much money for the founding of another Institution, to be called Lady Brentwood's Convalescent Home. He said nothing of this until he took her out northward one afternoon, to lay the first stone and hear a bishop's thanksgiving discourse. He told her all about it on the way to Hampstead. It was a little surprise—not worth speaking of before.

"But, Seymour—really, it should not be called by my name."

"It is yours, Gladys. You may call it what you choose. Does the name matter? I hope your Home will catch the summer sunshine and keep out the winter wind. I hope that your beds will be warm, and that your guests will sleep soundly."

She thanked him very gratefully for her Convalescent Home.

He was always inventing surprises. He believed that surprise was a useful agent, and that, well worked, it might achieve beneficial results. It was, he believed, essential to make her think of him. He fought hard to keep himself in her thoughts—he was unhappy and disturbed when he felt himself shut out of them. A surprise would open the doors of her mind, and let him in again.

Walking with him one day through Carolus Street, Gladys stopped to speak, and give alms, to a beggar woman. The poor wretch offered matches for sale, but obviously she wanted alms. Seymour hung back, and spoke himself to the woman; then hurried after his wife.

"Did you give her more money, Seymour?"

"No," he said blankly. "Why should I?"

"I only gave her a shilling—That was enough, I suppose. But she looked so cold and miserable."

"I think she has been a very lucky woman," he said carelessly; and his wife glanced at his face. She was surprised by the careless, unfeeling tone of his words.

A week later she was surprised by the receipt of a letter from the match-seller. The beggar had been taken from the cold streets, had been set up in business with a shop of her

own: she was selling matches and most other household requisites over a counter; she humbly thanked the Countess of Brentwood for her unexampled munificence.

"I told you," said Seymour, "that I thought her a lucky woman. I thought so, because *you* had smiled at her. . . . "

Another surprise related to the season's entertainments at Andover House. Lords and Commons were again busily talking, day by day and night after night. It was time to set in train one's annual work for the good of the Party. Gladys, conscientiously mindful of her side of the compact, came to him for instructions. Should they fix a date for something soon, before the end of February? Would he issue commands to Mr. Marlow?

"I shall never employ Marlow again."

"Oh! Then who will you get to do the evening-parties this year?"

"We won't have any evening-parties this year."

"Oh, but why?"

"They are fatiguing and boring—you shan't be troubled with them again."

Then she protested that she was ready and anxious to do her duty. It would make her uncomfortable if he refrained from entertaining the Party because of kind but unnecessary consideration for her. She was looking forward to these entertainments. They were of importance: they were an integral portion of his political career.

"No, they are useless and foolish."

"But you never thought that. Why have you changed your mind?"

"Don't you see that I am changing—in everything?"

This surprise made her very uncomfortable. She stood watching him from the open door of the library, feeling uncomfortable, but not knowing what more to say or do. He was just going down to the House, and his secretary had come into the hall with papers. She could see his melancholy smile as he talked to Mr. Roberts. He was handsomer than ever; his manner was grander; he was like a beardless Charles the First speaking to some loyal general during the Civil War;

—it was wonderful that anyone should resist him. She thought of him all the time the Lords were busy at Westminster.

While he was trying to make her often think of him, he showed that he was always thinking of her. Even now, in the tankish depths, held by the affairs of a vast empire, he was still pursuing his selfish private ends. Gladys, if she happened to glance at to-morrow's parliamentary report, would perhaps notice this item: *"New Bill.* The Earl of Brentwood introduced a Bill, which was read a first time, to amend the law in reference to the employment in shops of boys and girls under the age of sixteen."

"Oh, you noticed that, Gladys? I didn't know that you ever studied the reports."

"I do now—I used not to."

"My Bill will not pass, of course. It can effect nothing—Beyond drawing attention to the subject. It is *your* Bill. You suggested it—ages ago."

"Seymour, how can you say that?"

"Don't you remember?—What you told me about the boys who brought your frocks, in monstrous cases, on wickedly heavy tricycles! It's all in the Bill—but you mustn't hope that it will go farther than our House."

She could not but recognize the artful and insidious flattery of his courtship. The slightest thing that concerned her he lifted into paramount consequence. He would frame laws out of her hastily uttered, fanciful reflections! And yet, with all his flattering care and provident attention, he seemed to have been guilty of an almost fatal omission. He did not seem to remember one thing very near her heart. In all these months, he had never asked after Schiller. Not a single word of inquiry for the fate of our sick brother.—Is he dead or alive? Is he saved and redeemed, or is he going down hill, on that Californian slope, with acceleration of velocity?—Not one question. A loving sister must observe so callous an indifference. Lord Brentwood has been systematically unkind to Mr. Schiller. If he is changing in other respects, he has not changed in this.

Pride forbade her to communicate really favorable news of

the distant sufferer. She made it a rule never to speak of him. Her husband should never hear the name of Schiller on her lips, until she had heard it on his. But surprise made her break the rule. She came to Lord Brentwood with a letter in her hand.

"Seymour! Schiller!—How can I thank you? Schiller—Mr. Ingram says—Seymour—read his letter."

"No. I have no wish to read Mr. Ingram's letters."

"Please do—this is the last one—just come. He never said, I never guessed—Please read it—before I thank you."

"No. If Mr. Ingram sends me any message, tell me what it is."

He would not look at the letter.

The letter informed Gladys that Mr. Ingram was leaving her brother; that Schiller could now safely be left, because, though far from strong, he had recovered a considerable amount of health, self-respect, and so on. Mr. Ingram thought the partnership with Lord Brentwood had been the making of Schiller. The sense of responsibility had steadied dear old Schiller; the trust and confidence reposed in him by his distant partner put Schiller on his mettle to prove himself a man again; and Mr. Ingram felt sure that Schiller would not fail. Schiller for the last month had been living at the old Spanish hacienda in the middle of the orange gardens. He had absolute control of the great estate purchased for the partnership by Lord Brentwood, but his foremen were all experienced, hard-working people. It might be hoped that with their assistance Schiller would do well for the partnership, and make fruit-growing on such a large scale a most lucrative enterprise.

"Seymour—it is too much. How can I thank you?"

Thus artfully—and extravagantly—he wooed her. Kindness to beggars, kindness to Schiller, pretty inventions, theatrical devices—all these things he did with fixed aim and undeviating purpose. But behind him in every action of his life, from waking to sleeping every day, and in his dreams too, there was now one driving power—love. He loved her more than the world, more than life. Without her, the whole world crumbled, and life was worse than death.

Hope gave a glow to his blood, filled his lungs, made his heart beat firm and even—hoping, he walked on air, passed from place to place unconscious of the common sights of the town. He was coming down the stairs of Andover House; he was walking through Old Palace Yard—and between these fixed points there was nothing. He might have been flying high over roofs and chimneys, and he would have seen as many faces and heard as many carriage wheels. This meant that he had been thinking of her all the way, and that he was full of hope.

Every reason to hope. With orange gardens, private Bills, etc. he had certainly made progress—swift progress just lately. High in hope, he decided once more to test his progress. The time had come when stone lips should soften and grow warm at a touch.

He endeavored to soften her; and found that all his art had failed. Once more—failure and darkness.

"Seymour, I can't. I have tried to forget—I have tried to think it was what you said—an ugly dream—to be forgotten."

"It was nothing else."

"Seymour, we are at peace now, aren't we?—almost happy;" and she repeated a phrase that she had used years ago, when she loved him but resisted him. "Please let us go on as we are."

"I understand. I am still nothing to you. You care for me as little as you did seven months ago. Now I know—it's well that I should know."

"Seymour, I do care for you—and that's another reason. We are good friends—real friends, now. Don't let us disturb the arrangement. Don't ask me to risk all the old unhappiness over again."

"There would be no risk. Haven't I proved that you can trust me?"

"You have proved that you are noble and generous. Seymour, don't think me ungrateful. You have done so much for me—far too much. And you have made me admire and respect you."

"But not love me? *That* is the impossibility. Well, now I know how I stand. That's always something gained."

She looked at him appealingly; there were tears in her eyes; outwardly she was gentle and soft. But she would not yield.

"Seymour, I have tried—but I can't. I want to help you—but you don't let me help you. I'd do anything in my power to show you my gratitude—except that."

"You can't forgive me."

"No, it is that I can't forget. I ought to forget—and I have tried. But I think I'm different from other women——"

"You needn't say any more. I am quite satisfied that this is your final decision. I know exactly how I stand now—and I won't ask you to break our bargain."

He despaired, and he gave up the fight. His voice was hard and firm; anger and pride suddenly controlled and directed him. She should not enjoy her triumph, or know the full extent of her power. He turned from her abruptly, to hide his mortification and pain. He had fought hard till now; and perhaps he was despairing just when the battle was almost won.

It was evening, and he went out into the lamp-lit streets, and walked fast to get far away from his loveless home. It was cold, but he did not know that the wind blew upon him; rain began and continued heavily, but he did not feel the raindrops beating against his hot face. His angry thoughts were whirling; he swelled with bitter resentment; wounded pride goaded him along. Very good—so be it. This is the end. He has expiated his offences, he has worked for and honestly earned full pardon and complete oblivion. If she wishes to be implacable—let her. By all means let her nourish her grievance, foster her unkind memories, and harden herself in stubborn perversity. This is her final decision. He has told her so—and now no force on earth will ever bring him to sue to her again. He has a right to her love—yes, a clear indefeasible right,—but he has not based any claim on his right: he has humbly prayed to her for restoration of that which is his own, and he has been refused. Very good—leave it so.

He walked faster and faster, splashed by mud, whipped by rain, driven by furies. The rain came down in torrents; the sky opened and let fall a deluge; then closed again, and black clouds raced before the wind. He did not feel that he was drenched to the skin, he did not know the streets through which he passed. He had crossed a dozen main thoroughfares—Oxford Street, Portland Place, Tottenham Court Road, —and was tramping on, towards the ugliness and squalor of the North-East. He was tired already, and he walked faster still, in a sort of impotent struggle against space, time, and weather: determined to tire himself completely, and by fatigue appease the turmoil of his thoughts.

Soon now his anger was spent; and, with his increasing fatigue, hopelessness alone possessed him. He thought he was the most miserable man that had ever lived—more miserable a thousand times than the sordid dwellers in this hideous poverty-stricken neighborhood. He compelled himself to walk on as fast, or nearly as fast, as before. He crossed a road, and dodged among lighted trams—and thought it would be no matter if a tram knocked him down and crushed the useless, hopeless life out of him. He passed beneath railway bridges—and thought that the best thing that could happen to him would be for the girders, ballast, and rails to fall upon him and bury him. To be finished with an impotent, valueless life—that was what he should crave for now. He is no good to himself or to anybody else. He is too old now ever to do anything worth doing. His real life had gone—all the best of life had been wasted.

He was threading his way through the narrow streets of direst poverty. Just now the streets were full of people, and again the streets were empty. The sky had opened once more: everyone scuttled off to shelter.

Presently he stood with people under an archway, at the entrance to a wretched little mews. He was hot and perspiring, felt very glad to stop and rest. He leaned his back against the damp wall of the arch, and listened to the voices about him. In this chance shelter, there were men and women and children. A woman near him had a baby wrapped with sack-

ing, swathed in foul rags, pressed tightly to her bosom; and a little girl of five or six clung close to the woman's skirts. The men were dirty and fierce as wild beasts, but without the courage or the strength of beasts to face their battle with nature. The woman and the child were hungry and sick. The infant was too weak to cry, but the woman coughed and spat and grumbled, and the little girl whimpered and moaned. Outside the arch, a caped policeman passed and repassed. Directly the rain ceased, he would turn them out of their shelter; but he had not the heart to move them on in the midst of such a shower.

This, thought Seymour bitterly, is the real misery. His troubles, compared with these, are vague and unsubstantial. But he could not accept the lesson: his self-pity was too deep.

When he put his hand into his pocket to get out some money, he discovered what the rain had done for him. If not the most miserable, he was certainly the wettest person under the archway. His waistcoat was dripping; his pockets had water as well as money in them; his trousers were sticking to his wet legs.

The policeman set him on his homeward road, and he asked the way of every other policeman that he met. It was an hour and a half of hard walking before he struck the Tottenham Court Road, and knew his whereabouts exactly. Then he trudged slowly home, cold and tired now, not thinking of anything but bed.

The night watchman at Andover House stared in respectful amazement at the muddiness and wetness of his lordship. There was a muddy little pool on the black and white marble where my lord had paused; there was a thin trickle from step to step after my lord had wearily mounted the grand staircase.

XLII

SEYMOUR was lying ill in bed, and Gladys was making polite inquiries of his valet.

The valet said that his lordship desired her not to trouble

about him. His indisposition is a mere nothing—he himself is very well indeed.

"But you haven't been in to ask him."

"His lordship gave me the message beforehand, in case you should inquire, my lady."

"Did Dr. Prescott seem satisfied when he saw him?"

"Yes, my lady—he didn't say anything to the contrary."

"He didn't tell you anything particular?"

"He told me to light the fire."

"And the fire *is* lighted?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

Later in the day, she sent a message to the sick room. She will go in to see the invalid, if he wishes it. The valet returned with the answer No—his lordship did not wish it.

She asked the valet questions. Did Dr. Prescott say nothing about diet and nursing? *Who* is nursing his lordship?

Well, the valet is doing for him—and one of the maid-servants is lending a hand.

"Is Dr. Prescott coming again to-day?"

"Dr. Prescott didn't say he was."

"But surely he ought to come?"

"*I* think he ought to," said the valet. "*I* think his lordship is very queer."

Lady Brentwood hurried down stairs, and told Osborn to telephone to Hertford Street requesting Dr. Prescott to come again. She did not go for a drive this afternoon. She sat waiting for the doctor. The doctor is to be shown into the library, to talk with her before he goes up to the sick room.

"You know," said Dr. Prescott, "you really are a most reckless couple. You go driving in open carriages till you make yourself ill—and his lordship wanders about in wet clothes, comes home half frozen, and does not even take a hot bath—just tumbles into bed. Well, he must stop there now—that's all."

"Is the illness dangerous?"

"No, certainly not. He's all right."

"Are you really sure of that?"

"Well, how does he seem to you? Don't *you* think he is going on all right to-day?"

"I have not seen him to-day."

"Oh?" Dr. Prescott looked grave, and somewhat puzzled.

"He wants to be alone—to be quiet."

"Just so. Keep him quiet. You can't do better. I'll go up and see him."

It was the end of polite pretences. Her husband lay ill, and she had not seen him. It must be patent now to Dr. Prescott, and everybody else, that they were not living on matrimonial terms.

When Dr. Prescott came down again, he professed himself as satisfied with the condition of the patient. We are progressing favorably; we have some slight congestion, soreness of throat, catarrh, and so forth; but we are warm in our bed: we shall do very nicely.

"But Dr. Prescott, ought not you to get a hospital nurse for him?"

"By all means—if you think it desirable. Yes, just as well. I'll send you a nurse. She will relieve you of all trouble."

"When can we expect her?"

"Oh, at once."

But it was two hours before the nurse arrived. Lady Brentwood was waiting for her in the hall. The nurse seemed a capable sort of person, very cheerful, and rather domineering.

"Perhaps," said the nurse cheerfully, "you'll take me into his room and introduce me to the patient—that is, as soon as I have changed to my cap and apron."

Lady Brentwood excused herself from the ceremony of introduction; but she waited in the corridor outside the sick room until the nurse reappeared, and she watched the valet open the door for the nurse.

"Aren't you coming in?" said the nurse, with a cheerful smile. "Dr. Prescott said it was a chest case—so it can't be catching. You needn't be afraid."

Gladys did not sleep that night. She wished that Lady Emily had been in London; but Lady Emily was away, at Bordighera. She would have been glad if his sister had been

within reach. She could not summon her from Italy. Too far off—unless the illness should take a bad turn.

Sleep was impossible. She felt oppressed by the thought that the man she had loved was lying sick in his palace, uncared for except by hirelings, while she was close by, doing nothing—not even sleeping.

Early next morning she waited for the nurse outside the closed door.

"Oh, come in—don't stand on etiquette," said the nurse, as if the room belonged to her. "I have just washed him. He's quite fit to be seen."

Lady Brentwood did not choose to tell the nurse that she was shut out of the room by the patient's commands. The nurse would soon discover that, no doubt.

"Will you kindly ask Lord Brentwood if he would like to see me?"

The nurse came out again with an envelope.

"Here, he has written you a letter."

Lady Brentwood read the patient's brief message. It was written with a pencil, in a shaky hand:—

"I will stick to my bargain. Don't trouble about me."

Dr. Prescott kept her waiting, hour after hour. It seemed that Dr. Prescott would never come.

Meanwhile, she asked questions of the nurse every time that the nurse came out of the room.

"Has he been at all delirious?"

"Oh, no—but he is full of fancies," and the nurse laughed cheerfully. "He has a temperature, of course."

"Does he sleep much?"

"He dozes, on and off—a good bit. We want him to sleep. But it's dull for him, and he begins to talk, of course. I don't allow that. I've made them bring me up a screen; and I sit behind the screen, where he can't see me."

"But then, if he requires anything?"

"Well, he can call for me."

"But do you always hear him?"

"Oh, yes. *I* don't doze—behind the screen," and Nurse laughed. "But, mind you, Lady Brentwood, I shall want some sleep myself to-night."

Then Lady Brentwood ordered another nurse. The nurse in charge quite approved of this measure, but suggested that they should wait for Dr. Prescott's permission. Lady Brentwood, however, would not wait. She sent a note to the nurses' institution, and deeply underlined the word *"Immediate."*

Having despatched this letter, she wrote a note to the patient, asking leave to pay him a short visit.

The answer was another pencilled message in a gummed envelope:—

> "No. I am too ill to see strangers. If I had a wife—a real wife, she should be with me now."

Perhaps her anxiety communicated itself to Dr. Prescott. Perhaps by her endless questions she at last frightened him. Anyhow, he frightened her.

"We'll have another opinion to-morrow morning. I'll ask Sir John Birdwood to come and look at him. Just as well. But don't be anxious. I am quite confident—yet, in a case like this, where the consideration of expense is absent.—It is only what we doctors are always glad to do—share the responsibility."

She could not keep away from the closed door. She wandered, restless and disconsolate, about the great house, but was always returning to the silent corridor, to wait and watch for the opening of the door. The nurse was as cheerful as ever, but becoming dictatorial. She was delighted to hear that the institution proposed to send Nurse Adelaide, a personal friend of hers. Adelaide and she, as consorts, worked like clockwork. One nursed, one slept; and, if it could be arranged, they liked to sup together.

"All right," said Nurse. "I'll take in your note. He's awake now."

Nurse brought out another shaky scrawl from Lord Brentwood:—

"I am nothing to you. Why are you worrying? Why do you wish to come?"

Lady Brentwood made Nurse wait in the corridor, and then carry back her reply:—

"I am anxious and unhappy. I wish to see you. Let me come to you."

Nurse returned after five minutes, with the patient's answer:—

"I don't want you, unless love brings you. Don't come in pity, in duty, or in politeness. If I see you in my room, I must understand that I have recovered my wife—my real wife. I pray you not to come, unless you mean that."

"Look here, Lady Brentwood," said the nurse. "You'll pardon me speaking plain. But your place is inside the room or right outside it—not hanging about the door, where he can hear your voice. He lies there listening for your voice, and he has no business to be writing these letters in his weak state. He upsets himself. He's perfectly exhausted after writing this one."

"Exhausted! Shall I telephone to Dr. Prescott? What ought we to do?"

"Keep him quiet—that's what we have to do."

"But what will you do now—about the exhaustion?"

"Oh, please let me get back to him. I'll give him some milk and soda water—and then perhaps he'll go to sleep."

"Yes—yes. Come out and tell me, if he sleeps."

"And wake him by opening the door? No, I can't do that."

Milk and soda water did not make him sleep, but Dr. Prescott's drops did. He slept fitfully—waking and dozing through the dull hours. He was not delirious, but full of fancies.

When he woke after a long doze about supper time, he saw someone sitting by the bedside, and he spoke in a tired whisper.

"Who's there? Who is it?"

"It's your wife, Seymour—your real wife."

XLIII

STRENGTH flowed from her. He had never really lost her love; the ugly dream had passed; and he was strong and well:

They went away together—to Venice, where a yacht came to carry them further: to Grecian isles, to Golden horns, to Holy lands. They left their boat in a rock-girt harbor, and rode, with a sultan's escort, to robber towns on mountain peaks; they sailed over glassy seas, left their boat again, and crossed flat deserts, with Mr. Cook as guide and guardian, to see a sphinx's face reflected in old Nile;—and, wherever they went, they were peacefully, perfectly happy. They knew that they were one now—one and indivisible. No cleavage could henceforth be possible; nothing could ever tear them asunder.

They spent the early summer in Switzerland, among the high valleys of the Bernese Oberland, and returned to London towards the close of a season which, according to the newspapers, had been more than usually brilliant—although Andover House had never once opened its big doors. They were not too late to attend a few grand evening-parties, given at other houses, for the good of the Party; they were asked to three or four big dinners; and Gladys for the first time enjoyed these social festivities. Some friends or acquaintances reproached them for their protracted absence; others seemed quite surprised to hear that they had been out of London. The world had got on very well without them.

In the Lords, Seymour was told that he had been missed. Gray old peers came out of the shadow, crossed the floor, and

shook hands with him; rubicund old peers slid along the red benches in the sunlight, and tapped his shoulder. They all seemed glad to see him again—even those really big men whose hand-shake or shoulder-tap was, as he knew now more clearly than before, an honorable distinction. "Brentwood," said one of these fine old boys, "we have missed you. But your holiday has done you good. You look stronger, better—you look changed somehow. What is it? You always had a moustache, hadn't you? I'll tell you what it is," and the old boy laughed. "You have been putting on weight."

There had been no difficulty about going away. The ministerial duties of Lord Brentwood had been performed by somebody else. That strenuous and ambitious Under Secretary, young Lord Woking, had borne the brunt of opposition attacks against two public offices instead of one public office. The whip of the Lords had willingly granted furlough to convalescent Brentwood; untiring, wire-pulling Sir William had raised no objections. His place had been kept for him: he could settle down in it, and fill it as decoratively and charmingly as of yore. But, while the place was filled by the makeshift, the wheels of state had revolved smoothly; there had not been any nasty joltings, jerkings, or dangerous stoppages in the intricate political mechanism. He felt no slightest twinge of personal mortification as he realized how very well the great machine had worked without him. A year ago, such a thought might have kept him awake at night: now, it made him sleep more comfortably. He was a changed man.

Gradually all must observe, or at least feel, the change in him. No one perhaps more quickly felt the change than tactful, highly sensitized Sir William. This great man, toilsomely buttering, was aware of something unanticipated in the day's task. Something perhaps not remembered—but, surely, about our noble friend there is something new? He is, to our swift perception, extremely sun-burnt, calmer, more steady, more stalwart—and almost redoubtable in the smiling silence with which he listens to our oleaginous compliments.

"My dear Brentwood, I have been longing for a chat with

you. I am—on this occasion at least—a fully authorized envoy. . . . We really have missed you."

Sir William, with sidelong glances and full beaming interrogations, touches upon an anxiety that has passed in and out of august minds. This foreign tour and the consequent tight-shutting of a Party stronghold—this did not, we all trust it could not, indicate that Lord Brentwood was huffed with us, that he fancied our delay in a certain matter was derogatory to his fame, and that he was inflicting a severe punishment by depriving us of our delightful evening-parties?

Lord Brentwood smiled at Sir William encouragingly.

"There has been a delay," said Sir William frankly. "No one knows that better than I do. We said three years—didn't we?" And he continued blandly to expatiate about wear and tear of Governments—men worn out by office,—dropping out of their places when you least expect it. Sometimes the fretting-away of a Cabinet is rapid, sometimes it is slow. But one cannot deny that this Government is drawing on towards the term of its lease. Say, two more years to run. Not much time before us for fulfilment of our pledge—which we mean to fulfil, which we *want* to fulfil.

"And you, yourself, Lord Brentwood, have not abandoned interest in us? . . . You are so versatile—you have so many irons in the fire—but you intend to put politics first, don't you? These wonderful hotels—astounding one! You rub your lamp or your magic ring, and a huge caravanserai rises in a night—astounding! But all this business is a second string, isn't it? It isn't the main interest?"

Not that Sir William for a moment was suggesting that, in these democratic and commercial days, anyone could think it improper for a Cabinet Minister to be also the Chairman of a flourishing company.

"It is not as if you were making guns or ships, and selling them to us. I was only considering the immense amount of attention absorbed by any business-undertaking of that size."

Lord Brentwood smilingly replied that his hotel business had absorbed very little attention during the last year, that

he had in fact shamefully neglected it, and that he proposed ere long to retire from the chairmanship.

"You mean to retire? Ah, well—then that consideration is wiped out completely. . . . Now, frankly, I am sounding you. I am trying to get at your inclinations."

Then Sir William, after so much beating about, came straight to the point. Dear old Lord Knavesmere, holder of our best ornamental office, has intimated that he is weary and will resign next year. And it has been definitely decided that Brentwood is to be our next Lord Custodier. Nay, more than this. If Brentwood is in a hurry, pressure shall be brought to bear on our dear old Knavesmere. Loyallest and truest-hearted of supporters, Knavesmere will go now, if he detects the faintest hint that his room has become more valuable than his company. The grand old fellow is clinging to the official station, but he intends to relinquish it within a twelvemonth. A word, and he drops off now. Shall we say the word, and have our Brentwood in the Cabinet now at once?

Thus the shadow that he had been chasing assumed substance, and came within his reach. It was curious that while he hastened to and fro, the thing eluded him, seemed to recede farther and farther; and that when he turned his back, the thing followed him, crept closer and closer. It was more curious still that when the thing was here, under his grasp, he did not want it.

No word must be said to the white-haired Custodier: Lord Brentwood could wait indefinitely. He is quite content to be as useful as he can, in his subordinate situation.

Sir William applauded this noble sentiment, and rubbed his hands joyfully; but he discontinued buttering. The subtle change that he observed in Lord Brentwood caused his own manner to change.

"But I may take it—you authorize me to convey it—that your inclinations are not averse to the office itself—the Lord Custodiership,—that the offer, when it is made—and the offer will be made next February at latest—well, that the offer will be accepted?"

The offer, when it is made, will be considered. That,

wrapped round with politely dignified words, is all that wire-pulling Sir William can get out of a subtly changed Lord Brentwood.

The change was also observed by his deferential friends in the board-room at the St. James's Street office. Mr. Waller, telling him all the news of the hotels, was at once dimly aware that the ornamental chairman had become heavier and more solid, that he seemed to occupy more space, to carry his head nearer the lofty ceiling, and to make one feel relatively smaller. Mr. Tilney, shaking hands with the chairman, appeared a ridiculously diminutive rat of a man.

Waller declared that the Darmstadt and all the other hotels had missed their chairman so sorely that they were positively languishing. As Lord Brentwood knew, the dividends had fallen. Trade was bad throughout the kingdom, and everything felt the depression—eating-houses, theatres, etc. were always promptly affected by financial tightness. In these depressing circumstances, the recent general meeting went off rather badly. Waller himself had presided; and oh, how he had missed the decorative figurehead! That little brute Lamplough, the malcontent Sussex solicitor, created a disturbance. No one there to squash him: no Brentwood—no Stuart. Lamplough made a horrid beast of himself, blackguarding the directorate up hill and down dale.

But, Waller reported, things were going very well really. A little fresh capital would enable them to expand their resources in various fields: several small harvests would be reaped, as soon as they had more seed to sow with. As Lord Brentwood knew, they were on the point of issuing another £100,000 of the B. Preference.

Lord Brentwood did not know—he knew nothing. As he confessed, he had neglected his business shamefully. In ten months he had done nothing, except to take out large sums of money from the business. Of course he had been regularly furnished with information, but during the foreign tour he had been precluded from even a cursory study of papers duly presented for his examination. He was surprised by the decrease in the dividend; he was surprised by the necessity for

further capital outlay. He asked innumerable questions, in order to make up for lost opportunities.

Mr. Waller said the time was not exactly propitious for the new issue; but Sir Gregory Stuart had advised against postponement. The time might get worse instead of better. Neither Waller nor Stuart doubted of success; the prospectus had been prepared; the issue was already "cut and dried;" there would be two or three preliminary board-meetings, to pass the prospectus and so forth, and then they should launch it without delay. The chairman's arrival was a happy presage of unabated success: he could see them through their work triumphantly.

Lord Brentwood apologized for past remissness, promised amendment in the future. Now that he *had* turned up again, they might rely on his constant presence. He would be there at all meetings: they could not give him too much work to do.

Naturally, the reduced yield had tended to bring down the price of shares. Miss Irene Malcomson, who had dabbled prettily heavily at one time in Amalgamated securities, now thought that she ought to begin dabbling again. Her only doubt—a doubt that so often paralyzes the efforts of speculators—was whether to buy for a rise, or to sell for the fall. She turned to her old friend and adviser, Sir Gregory, begging him to resolve the doubt for her. But Sir Gregory forbade dabbling, ordered her to leave the Hotels alone.

"Don't be greedy," said Sir Gregory. "You have had more than enough pickings. Leave 'em alone."

Since Christmas she and her adviser had often talked about Darmstadt and the group. In the new year Sir Gregory had given her an excellent tip—to sell what she held. But, not satisfied with one good tip, and a most profitable winding-up of her accounts, she was always asking for more.

"I think I understand," said Irene once, "though you won't trust me and tell me the whole truth. They are not doing so well this year,—they can't get on without my pirate chief. Now that he has left them, they can't sail the ship properly."

"Rubbish," said Sir Gregory. "They can do very well without me now."

In another little talk, Sir Gregory, speaking particularly of the Darmstadt, said, "Of course nothing lasts for ever at the same high level. The public are such infernal fools that they will have novelty. When that's gone, there's a lot of the gilt knocked off the ginger-bread."

"Do you mean that the Darmstadt isn't paying?"

"No, I don't mean that, Miss Inquisitive. I mean that I looked in there last night, and it didn't seem as full as it used to be."

Irene, weighing words, carefully catching the lightest hints let fall in these pleasant confidential talks, thought she understood that Sir Gregory was discontented with the progress of hotel affairs. Indeed, some little while before the general meeting, her opinion was confirmed that the Amalgamated had entered on a long down-grade. She felt almost sure that the proper thing to do would be to speculate boldly for a continued fall, and she made up her mind that she would be such a bold speculator. But then her courage failed her. She dared not disobey Sir Gregory.

He did not go to the general meeting, but he was furiously angry afterwards, when he heard of disturbance and disloyalty among shareholders.

"Of course that ass Brentwood must fail us when the pinch comes. Just when we most wanted to show his pretty face, he goes and hides it. . . . Yes, I tell you, he *is* an ass—a damned ass. You say he's so handsome—like a king, and all the rest of it,—well, that's what I chose him for—to let a lot of infernal fools look at him; and now he leaves us in the lurch, and won't show himself."

Irene's eyes flashed, and she bit her lip, but she did not dare to defend the truant chairman. Sir Gregory was too angry.

He was angry again a week or two later. He announced to Irene that someone had been attempting to blackmail him. A little swine called Lamplough had come to Knightsbridge —impudently bearding the lion in his den,—and had made all sorts of preposterous threats.

"What did you do?"

"I heard what he had to say for himself, and then told him to go to the deuce."

"What had he to say?"

This blackmailing Lamplough, it appeared, said that he had written a pamphlet containing a series of accusations against the promoters and managers of the Hotel Company; and his threat was that he would circulate the pamphlet among the shareholders, unless Sir Gregory immediately proved the baselessness of the indictment.

"Hush-money!" said Sir Gregory, with a grunt. "That's what the little swine wants."

"Did he ask for money?"

"No—but that's the notion, of course. I'm to read his trash, and then buy him off—pay him not to publish it."

"Does he attack you personally?"

"Oh, the lot of us. We are all a gang of thieves."

"I suppose," said Irene meditatively, "it would be a mistake to pay him?"

"If you pay once, you can pay for ever—I'm not going to be blackmailed by Mr. Lamplough or anybody else. No, that's not my way. I told him if he came to me again, I'd break his neck."

Sir Gregory had been ponderously stamping about Irene's drawing-room, and grunting in his scornful anger. He sat down now, took some papers from his pocket, and began to read.

"Is that the pamphlet itself?"

"Yes."

Irene, looking over his shoulder, saw Mr. Lamplough's insulting title—"The Darmstadt Bubble."

"Don't be so dashed inquisitive," said Sir Gregory, putting his big hand over the printed page. Then, Irene withdrawing, he read on, with many grunts and scornful comments. "Oh, yes—thank you for nothing, Mr. Lamplough. . . . I've heard this tale before. . . . That's no news, Mr. Lamplough."

"Is there any truth in it?" asked Irene.

"No—the little blighter has got hold of something here

and there—and twisted and garbled it into a fairy tale. . . . Of course, things can't perpetually keep up—as I say——"

"But are things going wrong?"

"No. Besides—look here, understand this: if things *were* going wrong, it would be nothing to do with me. I am out of it—done with it. If they stick themselves, I'm not going back sweating and grinding to pull them out of the mud. Waller knows that."

"They can't sail the ship," said Irene excitedly. "I guessed the truth—they can't get along without their pirate chief."

"Rot! They'll sail the ship all right—if they can raise the wind again."

"Will you let me read the pamphlet?"

"No, I won't. And look her, my girl, I've told you twice already. You are not to be inquisitive."

But Irene was inquisitive by nature.

XLIV

SEYMOUR sat at breakfast, puzzling over a strange letter from Mr. Marlow. In effect, Marlow propounded to Lord Brentwood a conundrum precisely similar to that with which Miss Malcomson had worried Sir Gregory. Are the Amalgamated shares likely to go up or to go down?

"My lord," wrote Marlow, "I venture to take the great liberty of appealing to your lordship for advice. In common with other shareholders I have viewed with uneasiness the successive falls of the half-yearly dividends." And Marlow, proceeding, expressed his grave alarm at "the talk now going on behind the scenes." As of course his lordship was aware, a large number of clerks and servants had been dismissed recently from the Darmstadt Hotel. But his lordship might not know that these men were spreading the most damaging stories of Darmstadt concerns. They alleged that wages were in arrear, that nobody could get any money out of the managerial officials, that provisions and all consumable stores were

being obtained day by day from small retail shops instead of from the large supply houses, and that the tradesmen of Bond Street and Piccadilly were already shy of Darmstadt orders and loath to give further credit. These allegations, as Marlow hoped, could probably be explained by the spite of undeserving servants who had forfeited their situations.

And Marlow soberly concluded his appeal. He had invested his savings in Amalgamated solely on the personal renown and character of the noble chairman, and he had put in more money that he could afford to lose. For one in his humble circumstances, a hint whether to sell or to hold would be a great kindness. "I am, my lord, your lordship's respectful obedient servant, Geo. Marlow."

It was Friday morning; the board was to assemble at noon for the last of the preliminary meetings, and the formal passing of the prospectus, which would appear in the newspapers next Monday.

Lord Brentwood arrived in St. James's Street soon after eleven o'clock, and had a long chat with Mr. Waller before the arrival of their co-directors.

No truth whatever in any stupid tales set afloat by discharged clerks or waiters—Mr. Waller can remove any doubt from his lordship's mind in a moment. Success invariably rouses up envious enemies: dismissed servants are usually vindictive. As to these dismissals—the staff is always reduced at the end of the London season, and staff-reduction has been to a smaller extent this year than last year. As to buying retail instead of wholesale for the Darmstadt—that must be nonsense. It is, of course, a minor managerial detail, that does not come prominently under Mr. Waller's notice. But this is the principle involved—a main principle of good hotel-management. You do buy certain perishable goods from hand to mouth. Your caterers go round with sharp eyes, and buy in the cheapest market. Thus, if one morning they see a lot of cheap grouse or lobsters in a Bond Street shop, they snap them up for immediate consumption. Flowers for the table-decoration you generally buy from shops in the neighborhood—as many or as few flowers as you require. You cannot lay in a big supply

of flowers, to fade unused. This is all the ordinary routine of hotel management. You never know what will happen till each day begins. If it is a pouring wet day, you know then that you will have fewer people to provide for. The grand thing is nicely to gauge the day's demand and to have nothing left over, of perishable goods, when you shut up for the night.

"I am very glad," declared Waller, "that you told me what is being said. Forewarned is fore-armed. I hadn't heard a word of it."

Mr. Waller is thoroughly reassuring. Nevertheless, the uncomfortable doubt evoked by Marlow's letter does not pass away from Lord Brentwood's mind.

Directors, coming at noon, found the chairman seated in his big chair, with proofs of the prospectus spread out before him, with Mr. Waller at his elbow suavely and deferentially answering questions. Old Malcomson took a place at the table, and picked up a proof. He was sombre and mute-like in heavy black, with bowed shoulders, blood-shot eyes, and tremulous fingers. Grief had aged him rapidly. Rattish, alert Mr. Tilney, and fat, smug Mr. Adams took their places. The day's work may now be promptly finished.

The prospectus gives a statement of existing capital, sets forth a history of the undertaking, provides schedule of profits —profits of Darmstadt restaurant from inauguration in large type—But need we read the prospectus again? We have gone through it twice before; we are here to pass it for press.

Lord Brentwood asks questions—somewhat childish and easily answered questions. Are all these figures strictly accurate? Have they been examined by accountants? And did the accountants certify them as correct?

Courteous but over-worked Mr. Waller displays a disposition to laugh away an ornamental chairman's persistent interrogations. Time flies—nearly one o'clock—and nothing done.

"His lordship," says Waller, with a laugh, "is carrying us back to the beginning of things."

"Yes, you really are carrying us back now," says Mr. Tilney.

The chairman laughs too, good-humoredly, while he watches the face of the secretary-director.

"I fear I am very troublesome. And if Mr. Waller has any more important engagement——"

"I? Why—it is my duty to——"

"Yes, that is what I thought," says the chairman, still with his eyes on Mr. Waller's face.

Something in the chairman's scrutiny has been distressing to Mr. Waller. Again he feels the impression of increased size —the chairman sits higher in his chair, occupies more space, is absorbing more of the air in our board-room than on past days. Mr. Waller answers further questions with cheerful alacrity.

Something in Mr. Waller's face has distressed the chairman—an enigmatical hesitation, a shifty petulance, a vague fear. Without the least apparent cause, doubt has changed to suspicion in the chairman's mind.

. . . . "Oh, that is the accountant's own handwriting? Thank you. And this signature—p.p. John Poynter—is written by someone else. One of his people, or one of our people?" . . .

It is two o'clock, and the chairman is still asking questions.

"You see, Mr. Tilney," he says apologetically, "I am trying to test the accuracy of these Darmstadt figures, because really the restaurant is the only thing I know anything about."

"But it's rather late in the day to test the figures of two years ago."

"Of course," said Mr. Waller, "all this was in Sir Gregory's time."

Mr. Waller's clerks are hurrying to and fro as they fetch more and more papers; the outer offices are being ransacked; the board-room table has almost disappeared beneath the litter of documents. The directors are all helping Mr. Waller to pacify Lord Brentwood and stop his childish questions. Mr. Tilney and Mr. Adams both seem to feel strongly that this game of question and answer must not go on for ever.

"Gentlemen, I am very sorry, but please understand that I *must* be satisfied."

"But how can we satisfy you, if you mean to take *nothing* for granted? Sir Gregory was satisfied."

Mr. Waller, interpreting and elucidating, refers every minute to Sir Gregory. Waller does not know everything; but Stuart did. "Ah, Sir Gregory could explain that." "Sir Gregory had all those intricate details at the tips of his fingers." Tilney and Adams, when the questions are fired at them, both refer to Sir Gregory. "If you asked Sir Gregory, *he'd* answer you quick enough." And each time that Sir Gregory's name is spoken, silent and black old Malcomson lifts his heavy head, glares and trembles in impotent wrath.

"But what is the good of going on? The thing must be all right, because the proof prospectus has been submitted to and passed by Sir Gregory himself."

This is a happy thought of Tilney, and Mr. Waller is or affects to be triumphant. Let us find the light-giving document. Ah, here it is—the proof itself, signed "Approved—G. Stuart."

But Lord Brentwood cannot yet be content. He wants Sir Gregory to come and enlighten him further.

"You know," he says, with a grave smile, "we all seem in rather a fog. Sir Gregory will not refuse to help us?"

"Oh, of course not."

Then there is delay, and much telephoning. At last Mr. Waller gets into communication with Sir Gregory. Disappointment—Sir Gregory cannot come. No, not to-day, or to-morrow. "Ask him if he can help us on Sunday. The better the day, the better the deed." Sir Gregory is leaving London on urgent business. It is unfortunate, but Monday morning, ten o'clock, is the earliest moment at which he can make an appointment.

"Very well. Go back and make the appointment for Sir Gregory to meet us here at ten o'clock on Monday morning."

Lord Brentwood went on working, slowly reading dusty papers, comparing, examining. He had filled his proof prospectus with annotations. He was like a child who has fractiously stopped the labor of grown-up men, and is attempting to do

the work himself. But the child is a princekin whose pranks must be humored—courtiers may fret and fume, but they dare not treat him as they would an ordinary child. He is not to be smacked and sent to bed.

"I must apologize again," he said presently. "I am giving a lot of trouble, and I dare say quite needlessly. At any rate, I ought to have done all this ages ago—and not upset you now by my ignorance. I ought to have it all at the tips of my fingers, as well as Sir Gregory."

His questions and investigations had not disclosed anything that could possibly provoke suspicion—and yet unreasoning doubt still made him uncomfortable. Marlow's letter had set him thinking; he must go on thinking. Almost certainly things were all right: beneath the surface, as on the surface. To suppose that things were wrong, would be to suppose—He glanced at Mr. Waller's face.

"You intended to publish it on Monday," said the chairman, laying down his gold pencil. "But if I am not to see Sir Gregory till Monday . . . I fear I must ask you to put off the publication."

"Put it off! Surely you wouldn't postpone the issue?"

"You see my position, gentlemen. I am ashamed of giving trouble—which I confess is occasioned simply by my own ignorance."

"No, no," said Mr. Adams. "You've shown you know as much as I do—for one."

"It is what I may call a conscientious scruple," and Lord Brentwood smiled at Mr. Adams. "Nothing else. This is to go out with my name attached to it. Well, I feel the responsibility. I feel I ought to satisfy myself that every word, every letter can be substantiated by me, myself, if necessary. Will it matter if we postpone publication for a few days?"

"No," said old Malcomson. It was the first time that he had broken silence.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Waller. "But I think any delay now will be most disadvantageous——"

"I," said Tilney, "concur with Mr. Waller."

"Hold it back till Tuesday," said Adams, "and close the

lists Friday instead of Thursday. How would that be, Waller?"

"Or how will this be?" said Lord Brentwood. "Hold it back until *I* am satisfied that it ought to be published. Perhaps it will be safest to put it that way, Mr. Waller?"

It was nearly four o'clock. The chairman had kept them four hours, had frustrated their purely formal task, had deprived them of luncheon; and, oblivious of time, forgetful of food, he was still scribbling and scrawling.

"If nothing more is to be done," said Mr. Adams, "we may as well leave you."

"Good day, Mr. Adams," and the chairman looked up from his massed papers. "Now, we all understand—*you* understand, Mr. Waller? This must not appear until I am satisfied."

"Of course not."

"No, but misconceptions so easily occur. That is why I am putting it in the form of an explicit order;" and the chairmen went on with his work.

Urbane Mr. Waller, going as far as the stairs with co-directors, spoke in a low and angry voice.

"You know, this is utterly absurd—and deucedly annoying. Sir Gregory is furious at the idea of a hitch. It's too irritating——"

Their ornamental figure-head had come to life at a most inopportune moment.

XLV

HE stayed indoors at Andover House all through Saturday, and till late on Sunday. He was working at his Hotel papers, trying to make order in chaos—failing, but still resolutely working. The task was beyond his power; he felt that he was incompetent. He drifted here and there on a sea of figures; he groped amid labyrinthine entanglements; he tripped over an unrecognized fact, picked himself up, made a blundering circuit, and tripped over the same fact right in

his path again and once more unrecognized. Profit and loss account—Depreciation account—Capital account—Interim reports—Pro tem balance sheets, etc., etc.—he wrestled with them, grew hot, grew cold, grew weary, but doggedly endeavored to grasp them and pin them. Could not, because of his incompetence, get the better of them, did not after forty-eight hours know the head from the tail of them.

Was it only another ugly dream—self-torment, against logic and reason? Things were all right, must be all right. How could things be wrong? Figures, though not understandable, tally with other figures. Wherever you turn, from A Statement to B, C, or D Statement, figures tally and repeat themselves. And all figures are vouched for by trained accountants —"We have examined these accounts and certify them as correct." Could one seriously believe that highly-trained chartered accountants would say wrong was right? Surely they would detect and expose any inaccuracies? No valid cause for doubt or misgiving—things *must* be all right. This is a nasty worrying day-dream—nothing else.

Yet the burdensome sense of personal responsibility weighed upon his mind. He was the chairman of the company; he was answerable to thousands of unseen people. Marlow said he had risked his money on the strength of his blind confidence in the chairman's name. There must be hundreds of humble shareholders who would echo Marlow. What a horrible predicament for a carelessly ignorant chairman, if it should ever prove that things are not right but wrong.

"Aren't you going out, Seymour?" Gladys was standing behind him, resting her hand on his shoulder. He had not heard her enter the room. "Do go out for a walk and get some fresh air."

He roused himself, to speak to her.

"I am going to the evening service at St. Mildred's," she said. "You wouldn't care to walk with me?"

He said he wished to finish what he was doing, and then he would take a walk. He promised to go out soon.

She stooped over him and kissed his forehead.

"Your head is quite hot, Seymour, and you look dead tired.

Don't work any more—or you'll make yourself ill. I'll tell them nine o'clock for dinner—so you can get a good walk."

"Yes, I shall have finished directly."

It was dusk when he tied up his papers and put them by for to-morrow's use. It was nearly dark, and the lamps of Carolus Street were all lighted, when he came back after an hour's walk in the Park. At the corner of the side street by Andover House, there was a stationary four-wheeled cab; and, as he passed it, a woman inside the cab called to him.

"Lord Brentwood! Seymour—I must speak to you."

He looked round, and he saw a veiled lady half-opening the door of her cab and frantically beckoning him.

"Seymour, get in, please. Don't you know me?—I am Irene. They said you would not be gone long—so I waited. Jump in—and tell him to drive on. I may be watched. Don't keep me here."

"What is it? What's the matter?" He stood by the cab door, with his hand on the window.

"I must speak to you without an instant's delay," said Irene in an excited whisper.

"But what is it? Are you in trouble?"

"No, *you* are in trouble. Seymour," she whispered tragically, "I have come here at the peril of my life—to save you. Jump in, and I'll tell you everything."

"Please give me some idea of what you want to talk about."

"A gang of thieves—a pirate crew."

Lord Brentwood started violently, and took his hand from the cab door.

"For God's sake," whispered Irene, "don't hesitate. I have told you I may be watched. Come with me. . . . Gladys would tell you to come. I swear that Gladys would thank me for what I am doing now."

Lord Brentwood pulled the door open, and got into the cab.

"Tell him to drive to Regent's Park. That'll be out of people's way. . . . Now we are safe. I don't think anybody saw us. But I daren't lift my veil."

"No one saw us. Now, what is all this about?"

"Seymour, you have fallen among pirates. You are on a pirate ship—I tell you—and they have scuttled the ship. They mean to leave you to go down in it."

"Are you by any chance speaking of the Amalgamated Hotels?"

"Yes—the Darmstadt *bubble!* But it's worse than a bubble. Bubbles are *clean.* This is a blown-out bladder of filth and iniquity. It is rotten all through, corrupt and horrible, ready to burst and pollute the air with abominable odors."

"Going to burst?"

"One prick—and the bladder bursts itself—the Darmstadt Hotel drops like a house of cards."

"But what makes you think so?"

"I don't think—I *know.* I know everything now. I have found it all out—for *your* sake—to save you."

"Will you tell me what you know."

It was difficult to breathe in the cab. Irene herself seemed breathless, and she was filling the cab with nerve-vibratory atmospheric properties. She flashed and raved behind her black veil, and one seemed to feel, though one could not see, her deadly pallor and her intense gaze. The street lamps, lighting up the cab intermittently, showed him a writhing of the slim black figure, a theatrical gesture of the gloved hands.

"Your company is a gigantic swindle—rotten from the beginning. It is the most colossal imposture of a Napoleon of rogues. I'm speaking of Sir Gregory, of course—They are all of them rogues."

"Could you tell me less excitedly? I am not really understanding you."

Then breathlessly Irene explained that a man called Lamplough had written a blackmailing pamphlet, and she had read it, and she believed everything the man said was true. The man said that Sir Gregory had made hundreds of thousands of pounds by buying hotels cheap and selling them dear to the company; that he and his colleagues had made other hundreds of thousands by their swindling management of the allied

group. All the big dividends had been paid out of capital; none of them had been really earned. The bubble had been kept inflated by incessant share-issues, and the money raised by each new issue had gone to wipe out an existing deficit. The whole concern had always been insolvent.

"It's true, Seymour. I knew it was true when I watched Sir Gregory reading it. He said it was an attempt to blackmail him—and he swore he wouldn't pay. Then, later on, he said if one could be certain no one else had seen the pamphlet, it might be worth while to pay the man—and prevent a lot of silly talk.

"Now, I'll tell you what he has done. On Friday afternoon he went down to Eastbourne—and I know it was to buy off the man. I can't tell you if he has succeeded. He came back yesterday, and he was half mad from rage—not with the man, but with *you.*"

"Oh, with me?"

"Seymour, he has always hated you—and now he would murder you if he could. Guard yourself. Don't go about alone—don't trust yourself."

"Thank you. I am not afraid of Sir Gregory Stuart."

"Not of him by himself. But you don't know what he is. He would be capable of hiring assassins."

"Your love of the marvellous is running away with you. But all you have told me is very interesting.—Now, do try to tell me the rest as plainly as you can."

"It's all plain enough to me. I understand everything—except this. They dread you now—you have somehow interfered with their plans—and that other man, Waller, and Sir Gregory are plotting how to hoodwink you and keep you quiet. Sir Gregory said something about meeting you."

"Yes, I am to meet him to-morrow."

"Then beware," cried Irene tragically. "Seymour, I implore you not to make light of my warning. He hates you—and he is somehow threatened by you. He will do his worst. Promise me to be on your guard."

"Sir Gregory shan't hurt me. I promise you that."

"And be prepared for every ruse of the cleverest cheat in

Europe. He means to hoodwink you—if he doesn't mean to murder you."

"Is that really all you can tell me?"

"Seymour, isn't it enough? I have risked my life to save you."

"You are very kind. But I can't understand Sir Gregory's position. He has retired from the company—his responsibility has ceased."

"That is his position. He is a cheat—they are all cheats. He has made all he wants; he has got out his pile—but the longer the thing goes on, the better for him. Then he will say it was all right in his hands, but since he went out, you have muddled the business and ruined it. Can't you understand? They got you, to bear the smash that must come sooner or later. You are to be the scape-goat—to be left there till the whole thing crashes about your ears—you are to go down in the sinking ship."

"You confuse me—and you confuse yourself—with these grand metaphors."

"Seymour, how cruel and how cold you are. I thought you would thank me."

"I do thank you. But, Irene, can't you help me more? If that is the position of Stuart, what about the position of the others?"

"They have got out too. They have all made their pile. They are cheats, I tell you—his obedient accomplices."

"Your father—Is he a cheat?"

"No—not to the same extent. He wouldn't do anything dishonest—that is, dishonest according to the law. He's too old-fashioned and conventional. My father's character is complex—I believe—though it seems so stupidly obvious. He isn't what *you* would call straight. No city man is. But my father's position must be this—he would not mind profiting by somebody else's roguery. Besides, he is too shrewd to be deceived. You may take it that he has made his pile secure. . . . Ah! This is something I ought to tell you—Father hates Sir Gregory as much as Sir Gregory hates you. I need not tell you why."

"No, you need not tell me that."

"Another thing—don't forget. And don't mind my saying it—Mr. Copland is a cheat—an utter cheat. He is the creature of Sir Gregory—There was something about him in the pamphlet."

"You needn't tell me about that either."

"But you do understand at last? Seymour, you are so true yourself that you are blind to things that stare you in the face—you ought to have seen through your father-in-law. . . . Very well—I'll say no more. But as to the others, understand this. They have taken out their money. You'll find that what they have left in is for decency's sake—a few thousands each, that they sacrifice for appearances. While *your* money—however many thousands you have put in—is to go down with you and the ship."

"But, Irene, *I* am out too. I have taken my money out of the ship. I don't suppose my holding now is more than ten thousand, all told."

Irene clutched Lord Brentwood's wrist, and gasped in breathless astonishment.

"You, too? O Seymour—I can't believe it—that *you* were in the know—with those cheats. . . . No, I don't believe it. You found out for yourself—you guessed something?"

"I guessed nothing. But I have been very extravagant. I was spending a great deal of money last winter, and I sold my shares, from time to time, to get the money I wanted."

"It is wonderful," gasped Irene. "It was destiny working for you. . . . But, Seymour, there's something else more than money in the ship—Your reputation! You haven't got *that* out."

"I know."

"You had better leave me now. Tell him to stop as soon as we pass the Park gates."

"Yes, I'll tell him. But, Irene, before I thank you—Is there nothing else—nothing more definite? I am not sure if I ought to ask you.—In the pamphlet—anything really definite?"

"I read it too hurriedly—I was reading it at the peril of my life. . . . I wish I could remember. . . . He said Cop-

land's furniture didn't cost what they pretended. And—yes, this was definite. What they called the publicity account was a swindle—too big—out of proportion. He said it was Stuart's secret chest—and his secret service fund. They bribed and corrupted people out of this."

The cab had stopped; and Seymour stood on the pavement, with a hand upon the door, while Irene whispered her tragic farewell.

"Look around, and see if anyone is watching us. . . . Are you sure? . . . Seymour, you said you would never speak to me as long as you lived. I have done it—at dreadful risk—to make you forgive me. You have thanked me—Can't you say that I am forgiven?"

"Yes, I do say it."

"Then goodbye. Go now, and don't look back. Don't notice me if I pass you. I shall drive on, and then turn."

He moved away a few steps, and she called him again to the cab door.

"Seymour," she whispered. "Do you see—do you feel what I am pushing into your hand?" She held out some small trinket at the end of a slender chain. He could feel it for a moment; then she pulled away the chain, and with a faint tinkle it dropped back into its place by other charms and trifles on the chain.

"The key of heaven, Seymour! May I keep it? You have blocked the door, of course. You have put triple bolts and bars to shut out your fallen angel! I shall never try to use it—but let me keep it—still—to remind me of paradise."

XLVI

WHEN Lord Brentwood opened *The Times* on Monday morning, almost the first thing that caught his eye was the three-column advertisement of the new issue.

They had set their chairman at defiance. In spite of that

explicit order, here was the prospectus boldly published to the world.

The clock at St. James's Palace marked the half-hour after nine as the chairman approached the company's offices. There were sweepers and charwomen on the stairs, and the rooms were being put in order for clerks who had not yet come. Yet, early as it was, Mr. Secretary Waller and a co-director were already in the board-room.

"Have you seen it?" asked Mr. Tilney. "The very thing you guarded against has happened."

"I am very sorry," said Mr. Waller. "But somehow or other it has got into one or two newspapers—only one or two, I hope."

"It's in the *Morning Post,*" said Tilney.

"And it's in *The Times,*" said Waller.

"Please send out for all the other newspapers," said Lord Brentwood. "All of them, please."

"I wonder who is to blame for this," said Tilney, while Mr. Waller was out of the room. "Is it some mistake of the newspapers, or is Waller getting careless?"

Mr. Waller returned. He had sent for all well-known journals; he had been making inquiries of two clerks who had just arrived. He was very apologetic about this accident of premature publication.

Presently a sheath of newspapers was brought in and laid upon the table. The prospectus appeared in all but one of them. Mr. Waller seemed crushed by surprise; Mr. Tilney seemed ruffled in temper. He expressed indignation at an almost unpardonable blunder.

"You see, Mr. Waller," said the chairman, "it is a widespread accident."

"It is indeed—most unfortunately."

"Do you think it is really an accident, or can it be due to some misconception? You may remember, I told you that misconceptions easily arise."

"Oh, no, it is a pure accident."

"Can you explain it, or does it altogether baffle you?"

"The only explanation,' said Mr. Waller, "that suggests

itself, is this: Of course, the other day, when we arranged to delay publication, the advertisements were already in type at the newspaper offices, and——"

"But you did not tell me that."

"Didn't I? I certainly thought you knew it. If I am not mistaken, some of the advertisement proofs were lying on the table—with the other proofs."

"You mean, then, that the advertisements had all been sent out before last Friday?"

"Yes, certainly. Orders for advertisement space on a particular date are necessarily sent well in advance. Otherwise one could not be sure of securing the space—especially in the positions we required—next to matter."

"Oh, yes," said Tilney, "I took that for granted."

"What is it that you took for granted, Mr. Tilney? That we were here to pass for press something that had already been passed by Mr. Waller?"

"No. I took it for——"

"I had done nothing of the kind," said Mr. Waller. "The advertisement proofs were waiting correction. Not one of them has been passed by me."

"But the advertisements being in type, and no corrections being received—no counter order being received,—the newspapers in due course published them. Is that your explanation?"

"No, certainly not."

"Then how did you propose to stop the advertisements?"

"By letters sent to all the newspapers."

"Then why didn't you write the letters?"

"I did write the letters."

"Why weren't the letters delivered?"

"Lord Brentwood," said Mr. Waller warmly, "I don't understand the tone of your questions."

"Don't you, Mr. Waller?"

"I tell you, I dictated a letter, to go to every newspaper—Do you want me to fetch a Testament and make an oath on it?"

"My questions are quite legitimate, Mr. Waller. I am

chairman of this company. If you decline to answer, I shall assume that you are unwilling to tell me the truth. Now, this is my next question: Why weren't your letters despatched?"

"That," said Mr. Tilney, "is a question you can't object to. It looks to me pretty clear that the letters were somehow overlooked, and that we are getting to it at last."

"Please go and have a search made for the letters, Mr. Waller."

"I say," said Tilney, when the Director-Secretary had gone out again. "You *are* jumping on poor Waller."

"Do you think he deserves praise for disobeying my order, Mr. Tilney?"

Mr. Waller came back, apparently crestfallen, and profusely apologetic. The nature of the accident had disclosed itself. Here *were* all the letters—stamped and addressed, but never posted. They should have gone on Friday evening, about seven o'clock at latest. They were all ready then. They were in a basket tray, waiting to be posted, and some idiot had put another tray and files of papers on top of it. The letters had lain buried ever since. On Saturday—a half-day—everybody was in a hurry to get away. No one made trays and papers tidy—or someone would have discovered the accident.

"Waller," said Tilney indignantly, "I call that carelessness—sheer carelessness."

They had tricked him in a palpable and clumsy fashion. Tilney was assisting Waller to act the little scene hastily devised between them. Tilney's indignation was a feeble piece of acting; yet one could see that he believed it sufficient for the purpose. Any dust that we can throw will obscure the vision of this princekin's eyes.

"If," said Mr. Tilney, "a thing like that occurred in my office, I wouldn't rest till I'd sacked the joker who was to blame."

"If," said Mr. Waller, "I can fix the responsibility on——"

"Don't trouble," said Lord Brentwood. "Responsibility is often very difficult to fix in cases like this."

Mr. Waller turned his back, went to the bow window, and looked down into St. James's Street.

"You know," said Tilney, confidentially, "annoying as it is, I don't believe it matters the snuff of a candle. I'll guarantee you'll say no harm done after you've heard Sir Gregory."

"We'll see about that, Mr. Tilney."

"Here he is," said Mr. Waller, in the window; "punctual to the tick. That's always Sir Gregory's way."

It was a long day of emotional strain and stress for Sir Gregory. From the moment he came into the room and looked at the chairman, he saw that there was hard work before him. He was angry, but he must suppress his inward rage. He hated Lord Brentwood, but he must not show his hatred. He was tired of the whole thing; but he must stimulate his memory, sharpen his wits, flog his brain to keep it alert, prompt of turn, ready of invention.

"It's going to be infernally hot," said Sir Gregory, with a good-humored chuckle. "Let's have those windows wide open. Now, here we are——"

"His lordship," said Waller, "wants to know——"

"Everything," said Lord Brentwood.

"Quite so," said Sir Gregory jovially. "You have been away for months, and you want to bring yourself thoroughly up to date. Well, if I can help—command me."

"But Lord Brentwood," said Tilney, "takes us back so far—really to the beginning of things."

Sir Gregory slapped his broad forehead, and laughed gaily.

"The beginning of things is *here*. I am the man for this job. If I can't satisfy his lordship, I'll say it's my fault and not his. Now, my lord!"

"I would like, at any rate, to go back as far as this prospectus goes. May I begin with this statement—Profits of Darmstadt. Restaurant from inauguration? . . . Then—'Forty-seven days to Dec. 31. £5621 7*s*. 6*d*.'"

"Yes?"

"Those are net profits and not gross takings?"

Sir Gregory laughed again.

"Yes, those are net profits and not gross takings."

The chairman sat in his big chair, with papers neatly arranged; Sir Gregory faced him, at the other end of the table. It was a duel between the two. To interested spectators it must seem a ludicrously unequal contest—A child has strutted forward in a toy helmet, brandishing a wooden sword, and he challenges a veteran warrior armed cap-a-pie. Yet the undaunted manner of the child declares that the combat is to be *a outrance.*

"I want to know what the profits were for the corresponding period of the following year. The figures are massed together here, for the whole year. But could one get it out for the forty-seven days?"

"Approximately—yes. The account was made up for each quarter—and, I think, month by month. We desired to keep close touch, of course. Waller, look that up."

Adams and Tilney were sitting at the table; but soon they pushed back their chairs, rose, and sauntered in and out of the room. Old Malcomson had come. He took a chair in the bow window, as far as possible from the table, and glared at Sir Gregory with blood-shot eyes. He gave no sign of recognition when Sir Gregory glanced towards the window.

"Yes," said Sir Gregory. "This, as you say, shows a heavy falling-off."

"Not more than half the amount of the first period?"

"No. The novelty had worn off. But what about it? What's your doubt? I can't help, you know," said Gregory with jovial brusqueness, "unless you tell me what is in your mind. Do you doubt the accuracy of the figures?"

"No, not for the second period."

"But for the first period, eh? Very well, let's go back to that again."

"Thanks."

It was a duel between the two men. One was fighting alone, but the other had a second. Waller was supporting Sir Gregory, trotting to and fro, carrying weapons. The other men were merely spectators. They might lounge, or smoke,

or go away altogether, and the duel would be continued without them.

"I can't," said Lord Brentwood, "trace the cost of advertisements for this period."

"Advertisements are charged to Publicity Account."

"Do you mean—no advertisements charged to the Restaurant?"

"No—all that goes to Publicity Account—which is charged to the whole concern. You will find every penny of it entered there."

"But is that as usual?"

"Entirely so."

"But those dinners we gave—to the Press, and for special purposes?"

"Yes? What about them?"

"Were they not entered?"

"Yes, of course they were entered—but on the other side. You will find every penny entered in the Restaurant takings."

"How do you mean, *takings?* Do you mean that we directors paid for all that, ourselves?"

"Oh, no. That would have been too much of a joke. No, the dinners were, as I say, debited to Publicity and credited to Receipts."

"But I don't understand now. The receipts didn't exist."

"Yes, they did—The solid cash was transferred to the Darmstadt Restaurant."

"Surely that's an extraordinary way of——"

"It is simply a matter of accountancy. It is the principle from the base upwards. There are no figures entered to credit without the solid cash behind them. Not a bad principle, I think," and Sir Gregory shrugged his shoulders good-humoredly.

"But when these accounts were examined and passed by the accountant, did he understand that?"

"Presumably. Everything was put before him. He could call for anything he wanted."

"You mean, vouchers? But his attention wasn't directed to the point I am raising?"

"He is a chartered accountant. We could not stand over him and teach him his business."

"No, but I confess that the method of accountancy seems to me——"

"Look here, Brentwood," said Sir Gregory, with bluff and hearty good temper. "You are not, of course, too well versed in business methods, are you? Now, let me explain, rough and readily, the whole principle of our accountancy—from the beginning. It'll save time, and give you the key to the riddle that's bothering you. Take your balance sheet. Waller, give his lordship the balance sheet of the first year," and Sir Gregory, turning in his chair, uttered a loud expletive. "Damn it. Cramp! I've sat so long that I have got cramp in my leg. Ah," and he grunted. "I'll stand up, to address the meeting."

Then he made a wonderfully lucid exposition of the balance sheet. He stood, solid, bluff, and hearty, expounding and unfolding, pouring light into all dark places in order to satisfy the doubts of Lord Brentwood. He spoke easily and genially; yet the work that lay in this speech was severe. All the force of his flogged brain was engaged. He was using for this one man all the nerve-energy that he would have expended in addressing an assembly of two or three hundred men. The effort demanded was as great as for a speech at a general meeting of rebellious shareholders. And this was only one of half a dozen such efforts required to-day. The work went on all day. The strain of it was excessive.

"Now, may we go back to the Publicity Account?" said Lord Brentwood.

It was three o'clock. They had been at it for five hours, and Sir Gregory craved a truce. Mr. Waller was feeding him. Sandwiches and drink had been brought in: Sir Gregory ate hungrily and drank thirstily. The other men had been out for luncheon an hour ago, and were now back again.

"You're younger than I am, Brentwood," said Sir Gregory, "or you wouldn't do so much talking on an empty stomach. Have a sandwich?"

"No, thank you."

"Whisky and soda?"

"No, thanks."

Lord Brentwood had been smoking a cigarette. He threw it into the fireless grate, and returned to the table.

"I'm ready for you," said Sir Gregory. "What next?"

"If you don't mind, I'll keep to the Publicity Account."

And the duel went on again.

The strain was telling. The bell-clock on the mantel-piece had just struck five. Spectators, coming in from tea, might see the effects of unceasing mental effort. For the first time, Sir Gregory showed signs of ill-temper.

"Look here, Brentwood, do you want to stay here till midnight?"

"I am prepared to stay here till next week. What I want is simple enough."

"To tire my patience?"

"No. To be satisfied that every statement in this published advertisement which bears my name is strictly correct."

"Well, I think I ought to have satisfied you by now—but you know best," and Sir Gregory had a mirthless, grating chuckle. "Go on—I'll answer till all's blue. But—one minute. Do you mind if I ask *you* a few questions before we go on again?"

"No—I don't mind."

"Well, is all this your own—or have you been put up to it by somebody?"

"I am the chairman of this company. It is my duty to look into its affairs."

"That's not an answer at all," and Sir Gregory laughed harshly. "Look here, this is my meaning. You spoke just now of having doubts about something—I forget what. Well, are they all your own doubts, or are you letting off the doubts of somebody else?"

"They are my own doubts."

"You haven't asked anybody's advice before you came down here to-day?"

"I have asked nobody's advice."

"That clears the air." Sir Gregory had himself well within control again. He resumed his easy joviality. "But now let me put this to you, Brentwood, frankly. I am a business man and you are not. You are making investigations in business matters—all we have been talking about is just business routine but you don't understand it."

"No, I want to understand it. I blame myself for my ignorance."

"Yes, but I understand it—and to the best of my ability, I am trying to explain to you. Tilney, who has a business training, is satisfied. Adams too—Other people," and Sir Gregory nodded in the direction of the black figure and frowning face of old Malcomson. "Now, I say, let me put it to you: Is it wise to adopt an attitude of disbelief towards the commonest facts told you in the plainest way? There is no mystery—and no concealment. But how am I to convince you of that, if you question that two and two makes four, and so on?"

"You must take something for granted," said Tilney.

"These," said Adams pleasantly, "are little things that demand business experience. One can't expect them to be known by a person in your situation."

"My situation is the chairmanship of this company. I ought to know the little things. I see now how wrong I have been in not knowing them."

"Well, then," interposed Mr. Tilney, "I must say that, not being a real business man——"

"But you knew that—you all of you knew I wasn't a business man, when you made me your chairman. . . . Shall we go on, Sir Gregory?"

"Fire ahead."

"Let us keep to the Publicity Account. It seems to me disproportionately big in amount. I ask what factors compose it, and you tell me—or I gather—that the factors are various forms of advertisement?"

"That's about it."

"Nothing else?"

"All outlay incurred with a view to gaining beneficial publicity for our venture."

"Our advertisements must have been tremendous?"

"They were."

"Did the accountant see them all?"

"No."

"How was that?"

"He would have had to walk round Europe to see them. Some of them were in Norwegian railway guides; some were painted on the sides of houses at Brindisi."

"But I meant the vouchers for the outlay, wherever it was."

"Oh, don't mind me. Call an advertisement a voucher—say depreciation when you mean insurance—use the wrong word for half you say—and I'll do my best to follow the argument."

Waller knew how greatly Sir Gregory was feeling the strain. It was six o'clock, and the duel went on. Waller noticed the heavy, puffy look on his principal's cheeks. They were not nearly so red as they had been this morning. Waller, sitting close by, noticed the perspiration, saw the dull whiteness of eye, heard the labored breathing. Each time that Sir Gregory moved in his chair, he made a stifled grunt of fatigue. Faithful Waller brought his principal a fourth whisky and soda.

"Thank you," Lord Brentwood was saying, "that's the end of the advertisements. . . . Now I suppose there came —under the same head—into Publicity Account—all the presents that you gave."

Sir Gregory put down his glass noisily.

"Who told you that presents were given?"

"I intended to ask it as a question. Were not presents given?"

"I must ask *you* a question again. Has anybody brought you a tale about present-giving?"

"I have no definite information. I am simply inquiring."

"But what's in your mind now? Presents! This is a new line. Do you want to accuse us of corrupt practices?"

"The practices may be usual, for all I know. For instance —and I mean this as no disrespect to the Press:—we were all

anxious to have kind paragraphs—newspaper puffs. Were presents made in the hope of securing that end?"

"Oh, I see what you're after now," and Sir Gregory laughed again. "Well, I must answer that frankly, and the answer is: Very probably. Eh, Waller?"

"I think," said Waller, grinning, "quite possibly."

"Can I have a detailed account of all money spent in that manner?"

"Well, that is a thing one is not supposed to know about."

"Not even your chairman?"

"*I,*" said Sir Gregory, "never cared to know about it. A purely confidential little matter. All we wished to know was that the money had been well spent, and that the results were proving beneficial."

"But the outlay was entered as a lump sum from time to time?"

"Of course."

"It wasn't a sort of floating charge which nobody knew anything about till perhaps a year afterwards?"

"No."

It was past seven o'clock, and the duel *a outrance* had not been finished.

"I'll go back, if you please," said Lord Brentwood, "once more to Publicity Account."

"Don't you feel at home there yet?"

"Those presents we spoke of—Am I finally to understand that they were the only outlay of the kind that came out of your secret service fund?"

"Stop one moment, Brentwood. Secret service fund! That sounds rather an odd expression. I wonder why you used it!"

"It is a very ordinary expression."

"In this connection? I should never have thought of it. I have heard it in connection with Government affairs—but never in private business."

"I suppose that is why I employed it. I am better acquainted with Government phrases than business terms."

Lord Brentwood showed embarrassment. He had made a slip. It was an ordinary expression enough, but it was the expression quoted by Irene as having been used in the pamphlet. Lord Brentwood brought out a cigarette and lit it. He knew that Sir Gregory was watching him keenly.

"You don't happen," asked Sir Gregory, "to have seen those very words in print lately—in this very connection—the Darmstadt Hotel?"

"No, I have not seen them in print."

"Then what was your question? I've forgotten where we were."

"Were there no other presents of any sort?"

"None that I'm aware of." Sir Gregory turned abruptly in his chair, and uttered a loud grunt. "Damnation. Cramp! . . . I've got cramp in the other leg now," and he rose from the table, and stamped ponderously to the fireplace and back again. "I'll stand up for a change;" and he leaned heavily on the back of his chair. "Now then—fire ahead."

"You don't think that there were any large gifts made to any people who could not assist us in making things known to the public, but who nevertheless might be useful in keeping things from the knowledge of the public?"

"You're too long-winded. Why don't you ask me if I am a liar or not?"

"You object to answer my question?"

"I have answered it a dozen times." Sir Gregory was making a supreme effort: he mastered his irritation, and succeeded in laughing. "No. There you are. Thirteenth answer: No. Go on—I intend to satisfy you, Brentwood, even if you are purposely riling me."

It was eight o'clock: the duel was nearly over.

Lord Brentwood stood up now to fold his papers; Sir Gregory sat again, and stared at him with clouded, fishy eyes. Sir Gregory had borne the strain for ten long hours, but Waller, looking at him solicitously, thought that he was dead beat. His voice had become husky from fatigue. He was

consumed by rage, though his power of will enabled him even now to cenceal the angry inward fires.

"I have done all I can. You'll admit that, Brentwood?"

"Thank you."

"Well, are you satisfied?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Sir Gregory—and gentlemen,—I wish I could believe it was my ignorance of business routine,—but no single explanation I have received to-day has seemed to me satisfactory. . . . Behind everything you have told me, Sir Gregory—about our debts, our assets,—profits—above all, our profits,—there has been something inexplicable. I have tried to understand the need of this new issue, and its justification; and I can't understand. I have tried to believe in the *bona fides* of your prospectus; and I can't believe in it. I have tried to allay my suspicions; and the suspicions remain, strengthened."

"Of what are you suspicious?"

"Fraud, Sir Gregory."

"Fraud! Lord Brentwood, that's a deuced ugly word."

"Fraud is an ugly thing. I don't know any elegant synonym for it."

"May we ask," said Tilney, "what you propose to do?"

"The only thing I can do. The prospectus has been published without my authority. I shall publicly dissociate myself from it."

"Oh," said Tilney, "you won't do that?"

"Yes, I will. I'll not give my name to statements I don't understand."

"But you can't foresee the damaging effect of such a——"

"Gentlemen, you have brought this on yourselves. I warned you—you could have seen last Friday that I was not to be trifled with——"

"Don't act hastily."

"To-morrow morning the public shall know that this issue is offered without my sanction."

"Lord Brentwood," said Sir Gregory. "As a business man, let me advise you——"

"Thank you. As a business man, you have been advising me all day. This is a matter of honor. I don't ask your advice."

Sir Gregory came downstairs leaning on Waller's arm.

"Now, I'll tell them to get you a cab."

"No, I prefer to walk."

"Do let me get a cab—and then do drive home and rest yourself quietly."

Sir Gregory shook himself free of Waller's arm.

"Damn it, don't I tell you I want the walk? I want air."

"Oh, all right. But you are going straight home to Knightsbridge, aren't you? I'll follow you there, as soon as I can."

Sir Gregory carried his hat in his hand for a little way, as he plodded slowly up St. James's Street. He stopped, after turning into Piccadilly, and stood by a shop-front for a minute or two. Then he walked on again, mouthing and muttering as he went. He stopped once more, opposite Devonshire House, and hailed a cab. He had changed his mind about wanting to walk.

"Damnation! Can't you make your horse stand still—or how do you expect I am to get into your infernal cab?"

"Steady—woa. There y'are, guv-nor. . . . It's not the 'orse's fault now. . . . "

"Go on—Damn it, what are you waiting for?"

"You ain't said where."

"Curzon Street. Number 273 Curzon Street."

Electric lamps in the pretty drawing-room mildly contested with their soft illumination the failing daylight from uncurtained windows. Irene, pale and nervous, wearing a lovely Antoinette tea-gown, sat writing scented notes at her escritoire. She looked round, with a jerky suddenness, when she heard his footstep slowly and heavily mounting the stairs. She made another quick movement, went to the sofa; and sat smiling welcome as he entered.

He moved slowly, as if tired; and he spoke slowly, as if laboriously choosing his words.

"Well," she asked, "what news? How did your business go off?"

"Very badly," and he grunted. "I never remember a more disappointing affair. Guess what has happened," and he shut the door behind him.

"I don't know. I—I hope——"

Fear turned her cold, broke her voice, and made her stammer guiltily. As he left the door and came towards her, she could see plainly that something was wrong. He was angry—very angry. His eyes had the fishlike glitter that she had noticed once or twice before—a curious silver radiance in the midst of cloud;—there seemed far less than the usual color in his puffed cheeks; he breathed stertorously.

"Brentwood has backed out. Says he entertains suspicion."

"No?"

"Yes," and he stood over her, breathing hard. "You've betrayed me. You've betrayed me—you slut."

"I swear I——"

"Yes, you dirty little traitor—It's you who's made all this mischief."

Then with his open hand he struck her face.

"Yes," and he grunted. "Yes," and he struck her again with his other hand. Three times more he struck her with alternate hands, as a brutal usher cruelly using his full strength might cuff a revolting lout in a village school; and each time he gave a grunt—a curious bestial grunt, as of pleasure and yet of effort.

But the force of the third right-hand blow had brought her from the sofa to the floor. Wailing like a beaten dog, she looked up at him. His ring had cut her face—blood was streaming from her lip, as desperately she sought to get beyond the swing of his arm.

"Yes—you—you warned him."

She was crouching by the wall—six feet between them,—and she screamed, and raised her elbows to shield herself, as he made one slow step towards her.

Then, as he tried to step again, it was as if invisible hands had risen through the floor and seized his feet. His face became hideously contorted; his voice changed from hog-like grunts to a muffled roar.

"The dead men," he gasped. "Dead—dead—men!"

It was a sight most horrible in its swiftness and its mystery. It was like watching a man destroyed by lightning—without flash or thunder peal,—an appalling, unimaginable lightning that does not flash from the sky, but strikes upward from the bowels of the earth. It was as if one could see the ascending paralysis obliterate life and strength, as knees, legs, trunk subsided beneath the contorted face and he sank powerless on the floor.

XLVII

NEXT morning Lord Brentwood's letter appeared in a dozen newspapers, and many startled readers learned that the chairman of the company repudiated all responsibility for the prospectus of the new issue. Newspapers, with hurried comments, called it "the remarkable letter of Lord Brentwood." A writer of our city article, meritoriously contriving to add a postscript, said: "While preferring to express no opinion on this strange communication, we may safely predict that it will create a sensation among Amalgamated Shareholders."

Truly, a safe prophecy! The sensation of shareholders stimulated them to leap from a thousand breakfast tables, to ring telephone bells, to dash in cabs to the city, to rave in their stockbrokers' offices at the cruelty of not being able to sell their shares before the Stock Exchange was opened for business. Down went prices—down, down: the sensation was inducing panic. Sellers of Amalgamated were a rapidly recruited army, growing bigger and bigger every half-hour; and buyers of Amalgamated were a gallant little band, doomed to certain extinction. By noon, the sellers had annihilated them: not a buyer was left.

Indeed, it was a day of sensations for the holders of Amalgamated. Early in the afternoon come news to strike terror into all hearts. Shareholders, perhaps returning from the city reassured by sanguine brokers, read the black tidings on newspaper bills, or heard it hoarsely shouted by demon boys. Perhaps they were thinking all would come right in the end.—Unreasoning panic will pass—better wait and hope—time enough to sell—folly to throw our shares away for nothing.—And then the death knell sounded on their ears. *"Suicide of Sir Gregory Stuart.* Amalgamated Fiasco. Sir Gregory Stuart commits suicide."

It was a merciless device of that too hasty newspaper, to give shareholders such an afternoon sensation as this. It was cruel to say that the dead man had taken his own life. But really the public themselves are to blame for little errors of this kind. The public themselves cause all the hurry in newspaper offices: they *will* have their news promptly; they will *not* allow proper time for one to see if it is true or false. The man is dead—no doubt of that;—and, hard pushed by our public, we have jumped to a wrong conclusion as to the manner of his death. This newspaper candidly said it was sorry for the mistake, gave absolutely correct news—after it had sold three editions with the incorrect news.

The deceased gentleman, as we now learn, has passed away with a tragic unexpectedness, but there are no grounds for the rumor of self-immolation; nor is there necessarily any connecting link between this sensational event and the previous sensation. There would appear to be trouble in the managerial control of the Darmstadt Hotel, and Sir Gregory Stuart, who was so closely identified with the Darmstadt and the allied hotels, has suddenly died. But only those with more knowledge than we possess could be justified in attempting here to trace cause and effect.

Sir Gregory—other papers relate—was seized with a fit while calling upon friends in Curzon Street. It is understood that he was generally believed to enjoy robust health. It is an unquestionable fact that he had been attending to business matters at the headquarters of the Darmstadt Company within

a few hours of the fatal attack. No one seems to have anticipated for him illness or danger of an apoplectic character. But alas, in the course of a friendly visit, when lightly conversing with his hostess on indifferent topics, the unfortunate gentleman sank back in his chair unconscious. He never recovered consciousness; it was impossible to remove him to his own residence at Knightsbridge; he died early this morning in the house of his Curzon Street friends. Presumably—in view of the suddenness of the event, but for no other reason—an inquest will be deemed necessary. The fullest sympathy is expressed in all quarters for Lady Stuart, the widow, who is a permanent invalid.

The great Darmstadt Bubble had burst.

Death struck coldly on the quick-beating hearts of shareholders: with Sir Gregory, hope seemed to go out into the fathomless darkness. Their leader and shepherd was taken from them: henceforth, panic fear took command of these flocking sheep. Credit has gone—everything has gone. The hotels are besieged by big people and little people.—"Pay us what you owe us. Let your commissionaires turn us out at their peril. Very well—we will come back. We will sit on your doorsteps till you pay our bills."

The mighty Darmstadt could not now procure a cake of scented soap or a nosegay of common roses, unless it went to market with money in its purse. And—last dreadful sensation of these dark days—a fierce blowing away of iridescent bubble fragments—there came the wide circulation of Mr. Lamplough's pamphlet, and publication of long extracts in a well-known financial journal.

It is appalling, this screed of virulent Lamplough, a bone-shaking piece of work, if you believe in the truth of his devastating indictment. The pamphleteer vows that he will prove the monstrous truth, every word of it—conspiracy, corruption, rottenness *ab initio*—a robber band pillaging the defenceless world.

Events succeed each other rapidly now—one can scarce follow these milder "sensations." Amalgamated affairs are

swept into the hands of lawyers. Mr. Copland, it is announced, has threatened proceedings for libel against Mr. Lamplough and the proprietor of the financial journal. Mr. Copland, it transpires, has dropped the proceedings. Petitions are being filed.—Someone says the company is filing its own petition. Trustees for debenture-holders are wickedly active. Every week one reads of applications to the vacation judge being ordered to stand over for the convenience of counsel, or for the production of further and better affidavits; and at length one learns that an order has been made for the compulsory winding-up of the company, and the public examination of the directors. The official Receiver has been appointed Liquidator, and he is applying for sanction to borrow £20,000 wherewith to carry on his hotels while he inquires why the hotels could not be carried on by others without more cash. "Of course you have heard that there is to be a Public Inquiry"—and before one can gossip much about this news, behold, Public Inquiry has opened. It is altogether a grand time for lawyers.

Messrs. Killick and Mills were unremittingly busy for their august client. The head of the firm felt in duty bound to forego his summer holiday. From the first information of the impending disaster, Mr. Killick considered this business "most unfortunate." If, however, in confidence with junior partners, he deduced the old lesson that nothing but misfortune can ever come from acting without your solicitor's advice, he did not say it to the rash and self-willed client. He will give his nights and his days now to the client's service, and will not whisper "I could have told you so." But he must not, of course, refrain from telling Lord Brentwood how very unfortunately we are situated in all respects. This pamphlet is distressingly unfortunate in its allegations against a father-in-law; also very unfortunate in the circumstance that Mr. Copland has decided to wait quietly—rather than go straight ahead with his appeal to law for punishment of his traducer. It would be fortunate for us if Papa could swiftly squash Lamplough. But he says he will wait. Now there could be only one thing more unfortunate than this dilatory waiting of Mr. Copland; and that, as Killick hints, would be pre-

cipitate movement to foreign parts by Mr. Copland. Killick is compelled to lay this consideration before his client. A very bad impression will be created if Mr. Copland is on the Continent just when he is required in London to reply to public interrogations. Killick, communicating with Copland, finds him in a nervous, excited state. Thoughts of Copland necessitate frequent conferences with learned counsel, at which Killick thinks his guineas hardly earned.

Accompanied by his client, Mr. Killick called at the shop in Oxford Street one afternoon, and had a long talk with Mr. Copland.

"Oh, my dear Brentwood—Oh, my dear sir," said Copland wildly. "This is the end of the world to me. I feel as if the solid ground had opened under my feet."

The shop, as well as its proprietor, appeared to be in a condition of perplexed adversity. Clerks and shopmen seemed to have deserted it; nearly all the stock had been removed; and a bill in the window announced that the two spacious upper floors were to let.

"This awful calamity," said Copland—"the death of my patron—leaves me defenceless—at the mercy of enemies," and he opened and shut his mouth, and moistened his lips before he could go on talking. "All are against me now. When the world thinks a man is down—no one believes he can get up again. Trade difficulties have instantly supervened. My trade is at a standstill. But a crueller blow—fate has cut off my right hand,—my heart is pierced, at a time when I want my head clear, and undisturbed by private woe. . . . But this is not a business question. Ah, forgive me, Mr. Killick, if I ask my son-in-law to indulge me with a few words of sympathy quite apart from business. . . . "

Then, leading Seymour into the empty bureaux, Mr. Copland told of the disloyal conduct of Miss Vincent. Telling the sad tale, he brought out a handkerchief and shed profuse tears.

"Her desertion has unmanned me. Brentwood, my dear fellow, you are a man of the world—with generous sympathies. You will not blame me for this weakness. What I

have done for that ungrateful girl! Is it not cruel—to leave me in the hour of tribulation? At the first breath of evil report, she casts me off. Gratitude, regard, ignored—And I trusted so implicitly to her regard and proper feeling. . . . Dear Gladys, I believe, always saw through her—would not countenance her—tacitly blamed me for the connection. If you speak of this to Gladys, tell her she was right. . . .

"Very well, we'll not pursue the subject further. . . . Thanks, thanks—you are kindness itself. Beg Mr. Killick to join us. What is it that he wishes to know? How can I assist you?"

They had a long talk, but it was obvious that Mr. Copland could not assist them. He could only show them his regret for a luminous past, and his fear of a dark future. He uttered unceasing laments for the death of Sir Gregory.

"What can we do without him? Knock out the corner stone, and the building must fall. But to *me,* most of all, it is destruction. The poor dear fellow bolstered me up.—He put me on my legs and guaranteed to keep me there. And if he had lived he would have done so. But this awful calamity—Oh, this crushing blow of death! . . .

" . . . What is it they want to know? Most of the things I don't know myself. If they turn me inside out, they probably won't be any wiser;" and very plainly Mr. Copland showed fear. He drew Lord Brentwood aside once, and spoke in a whisper. "What do they suspect? Hanky-panky? I have never done anything I'm ashamed of—if I am allowed to explain it properly. But, of course, as any business man knows—be it the furniture trade or any other trade,—you cannot get on in any large business nowadays without a certain amount of hanky-panky;" and he opened and shut his mouth and coughed huskily.

No holiday for Mr. Killick, and not much holiday for Seymour. Fashionable Intelligence reported that Lord Brentwood, "whose name is so prominently before the public in regard to the collapse of the Amalgamated Hotels," has gone to Yorkshire, where he will spend the autumn with Lady

Brentwood. Fashionable Intelligence, had it been more completely informed, would perhaps have added with its usual delicacy that Lady Brentwood is not very strong this autumn, and will not therefore be entertaining any large house-parties either in Yorkshire or Wiltshire.

In fact, Lord Brentwood is with his wife whenever he can be spared from London. He goes backwards and forwards: he is at the beck and call of busy lawyers. No real holiday—just when he might have been so happy, still another nightmare dream beginning for him. Just when he wanted to stay by his wife's side, revel in a husband's proud love, feel the instincts of a father reawakening in his breast, he is ruthlessly snatched away again.

He is in London, of course, for the Public Inquiry; is almost asphyxiated in the crowded room at Carey Street; is asked insulting questions by a bullying jew-barrister on behalf of Mr. Lamplough, who is here to substantiate the truth of his pamphlet. Lord Brentwood explains how and why he sold his shares—to meet current expenses, and with no other motive of any sort. This whacking sum of £170,000 in the month of January was required for a Convalescent Home; that £30,000 in February was for a Californian land purchase. Lord Brentwood answers all questions. The other directors answer all questions—however insulting—that you care to ask them.

This, synoptically, is the pamphleteer's indictment—or the case for irately suspicious shareholders, now to be judicially sifted and tested by presiding authority.

According to Lamplough, the conspiracy of the dead man Stuart has in its essence been staggeringly simple. To begin with, he bought a hotel for £11,000, furnished it, and sold it to the public for £150,000. No. 1 Hotel paid a big dividend, and on the strength of this initial success, he repeated the operation, bought and sold another hotel; and so on, down the long series, until he came to No. 14 Hotel, the colossal Darmstadt. Big first dividends were the order of the day; each venture seemed a striking success; and all the time Stuart was obtaining more and more capital from the public. But

the dividends were never really earned: to all intents and purposes they were paid out of the capital.

But how, conceivably, could such a fraud be perpetrated? Well, that was the work of Stuart and his accomplices. These companies had a secret chest, and into this some of the money of the public was ingeniously poured. Out of the secret chest came money to swell dividends; to bribe and corrupt everybody who could facilitate deception, or who could bring about exposure. Prime accomplice in this part of the fraud was A. W. Copland. He was a man of straw, set up in business by Stuart and fobbed off on the public as a flourishing and highly esteemed tradesman. To him was given the contract to supply the furniture for the first hotel for £27,000, and at this exaggerated value it appeared as an asset on flotation. In truth, the furniture cost less than half the amount, and Copland never received half the amount. The difference found its way into the secret chest. This furniture trick was played again and again, on a larger and larger scale, until, when the vast Darmstadt was reached, the robbery was gigantic. As specific instances, Lamplough was prepared to prove that curtains ostensibly costing £763, at a guinea a yard, in fact cost only £60; 12 writing tables at £27 each cost only £84; three worthless daubs were charged for as masterpieces by Reynolds or Romney at £12,000. This was the price paid by the public, but it was not alleged that Copland received this price. No, the difference went into the secret chest, and provided that which was essential for carrying on the fraud—cash to bump out the spurious profits.

Lamplough promised, in support of his accusations, to show that there was an extraordinary system of present-giving or bribery continuously practised with regard to people concerned in the valuation of the company's assets. All who had to do with Copland's contracts—surveyors, appraisers, accountant's clerks, etc.—were bribed with gifts. Their silence was bought. No expert was ever admitted until Stuart, Copland, and their accomplices had first got hold of him and corrupted him.

And did not the irrefutable logic of facts support Mr. Lamplough? The fraud could be sustained only by a perpetual

bleeding of the public. This man, Gregory Stuart, in a few years had extracted something like five millions sterling from the public; then he withdrew, and the extraction of new capital ceased; and in a year the true state of affairs disclosed itself. The dividends dropped to nothing; debts accumulated; the company was hopelessly insolvent.

Lamplough, the virulent pamphleteer, said he could prove all this, was given every opportunity of proving it—and lamentably failed. Official Receiver with all his questions can do no more than Lord Brentwood did with his questions. It is impossible to unravel the tangle left behind him by the great Sir Gregory. With every question you ask, your suspicion deepens, but you are no nearer to giving it a firm basis. Figures tally with figures, everything seems accounted for; and yet you obscurely feel the veils of fraud, though you cannot tear them and rend them.

Copland himself is here to answer questions—and not recruiting his health on the Continent. He is examined day after day. Some days he seems half rogue and half fool; other days he seems wholly rogue or wholly fool; but generally things look bad for Copland. He owns that his accounts are muddled; but he swears that in the circumstances this is natural. He explains the muddle by the multiform character of his relations with the late Sir Gregory. First of all, Stuart was his very dear friend—"a heart of gold," says Copland with emotion. Then again, Stuart was his partner—a sleeping partner in the furniture business—that is to say, Stuart propped him on his legs by loans. Stuart was merely his patron when he gave out contracts for the hotels. And again, Stuart was his private customer. Copland worked for Stuart in the ordinary way of trade. For instance, he renovated the octagon hall at Knightsbridge; and, quite recently, he furnished and decorated a house for Sir Gregory in Curzon Street.

It thus naturally followed that Copland never quite knew how he stood financially. The hotel contracts were never cleaned off neatly. The jobs were always enlarged by heavy extras; payments were made on account from the signing of

each contract—"Mr. Vardon looked after all that." One contract overlapped another—and so on. But Copland, however you question him, is unshaken on this point: he always received full payment from the companies. At whatever figure his furniture appeared in the published accounts, that figure represented the amount of cash duly paid to him. There are all his formal receipts, examined and passed by half a dozen people. If, therefore, you are cruel enough to contend that he charged too much—if you persist in your belief that he is an extortionate rogue,—you must take it that he cheated for himself, and not for the dead man or his living associates.

To the larger public, carelessly reading newspaper reports of these proceedings, it seems plain that Mr. Copland is an unmitigated rogue. As to the rest of them, one may believe what one pleases—the thing is too tedious to be gone into carefully. But may not one take it for granted that all these directors were cheats? They all seem to have got out their money before the smash. That old one, Malcomson, left most in—£40,000, wasn't it? And the lord had the least to lose. Those presents that they gave—that looks like bribery, doesn't it? In the mind of the great stupid careless public, Amalgamated directors are classed with certain venal boards of guardians, or pilfering workhouse officials, who lately had suffered punishment and disgrace. One carelessly hopes that these Hotel gentlemen may be dropped on heavily.

Public Inquiry, then, inquiring for seventeen weary days, is abortive, or barren of substantial results. Only this one solid fact comes out of the protracted inquisition. The total assets of the company, including good-will, are sufficient for the security of Debentures and three-quarters of the Preference; the other quarter of the Preference and all the Ordinary are wiped out. Or, to state the fact in other words: what Stuart has sold to the public for five millions is worth only three millions. At three millions, his hotels might have been a profitable bargain, might flourish merrily and recoup all investors. But now, putting the deplorable fact in still other words, the public has parted with about two millions sterling

which it will never see again,—can never see again unless a miracle happen, because it is gone irrevocably.

Nevertheless, throughout the autumn—so curious for newspaper readers to observe,—the Darmstadt and all the other hotels seem to go on as if nothing untoward had occurred. The Darmstadt restaurant is as full as it ever was at this time of year. The electric light blazes from the crystal chandeliers; pretty ladies see themselves brightly reflected in looking-glass doors; and recherché repasts are elegantly served at the old fiendish tariff. Not, however, by Monsieur Nicolas —he is superseded. But another pursy Frenchman struts in his place, and is nearly, if not quite, as insolent.

Facetious diners perhaps crack feeble little jokes with head waiters. "I don't like this Liquidation gravy. Has the Official Receiver engaged a new, cheap cook? . . . Now don't stick it on to my bill because you are bankrupt." Otherwise all is as it was.

There is, of course, talk of the chairman—no longer discreet whispering, but noisy ill-considered chatter.

"Do you believe what they are saying about him?"

"Seymour Brentwood would be above that sort of thing. Yet—it is all so odd."

"Don't you know, what I can't get over is this:—Last November he had nearly three hundred thousand in the company—and eight months afterwards, just before the crash, he had only seven thousand."

"But are you sure that is accurate?"

"He confessed it himself. It came out at the Inquiry. You know, a lawyer told me one of the shareholders is going for him for fraud and conspiracy."

XLVIII

IT was true. And now, in the muddy drab-hued days of December, the action is being heard before the Lord Chief Justice and a special jury. Lamplough *v.* the Earl of

Brentwood and Others.—This, as newspapers tell us, is an action against the defendants for conspiring together to defraud the plaintiff by inducing him by false and fraudulent statements to purchase shares in a company called the New Darmstadt Hotel Company.

Intrinsically, it is a very trifling matter. It means that virulent Lamplough bought a paltry £100 of the second Darmstadt issue, he wants his money back, and he is suing Lord Brentwood and the other directors for its recovery. But he will not succeed. Wise legal advisers declare that he has not the ghost of a chance. He probably knows so himself; but he is vindictive, he wishes to be nasty, and he takes this opportunity of thrashing out his wretched pamphlet once again. Of course the chairman and directors must strenuously defend the action, because, were this shareholder to succeed, all the rest of the shareholders might launch similar actions. Legal advisers may perhaps remark that though Lamplough will fail as against the defendants, he may incidentally land our friend Copland in Queer Street.

To the large unthinking public the matter is of very different import. Newspaper readers see those words, "false and fraudulent statements," "conspiring," etc., and regard it as the case of a nobleman in trouble. Totally unable to discriminate between a civil action and criminal proceedings, they speak of it as "the trial of Lord Brentwood."

Newspaper editors, indulging their readers, say the case is one of "sensational interest," at least twenty counsel are engaged in it, the court is to be packed with members of the aristocracy. Sketches of Lord Brentwood in court, sketches of Lord Brentwood walking and talking with his legal advisers —newspapers cannot supply too many portraits of the principal defendant. Again let us see snap-shot of Lord Brentwood driving up to the Law Courts, mud churning from brougham wheels, mud ready to bespatter his lordship if he be not very careful.

The mud is flying. That explains the intensity and far-reaching character of the interest. That is why there is no elbow-space for defendants and their solicitors, or for witnesses, solicitors' clerks and messengers, or for the cartloads of books

and papers of the bankrupt company. That is why galleries and gangways are densely thronged, and why, on back benches behind K. C.'s and juniors, ladies of exalted station and historic names are content to suffer close pressure and constraint by half-washed plebeian neighbors.

"Conspicuous this morning among fashionable visitors were the Marchioness of Molesey, Lady Enid Carisbrooke, etc."—Yes, we want to gape at dear reckless Seymour Brentwood, assailed by mud-throwers. There he sits, on the front bench of all, facing his judge. He seems to us more handsome than ever—wrapping himself round in melancholy dignity—looking like a deposed prince—like Charles the First at his trial in Westminster Hall—like anything splendid, tragic, or morbidly interesting.

. . . "And I must trace at some length—for a clear understanding of his position—the previous trade adventures of this man Copland—who is, as I say, the father-in-law of the defendant Lord Brentwood. The father-in-*law,* as I was saying, of Lord Brentwood." . . .

This is the interminable opening speech of plaintiff's counsel, listened to in dull disgust by the principal defendant. Lamplough has briefed a third-rate K.C., who, with obsolete bluster and portentous manner, is telling the gloomy tale of the man of straw. For the second time a son-in-law hears the tale—Copland in the foggy King's Road, Copland set upon his rickety legs in Oxford Street.—It is endless. It goes on all one day and half the next.

. . . "I pass from these beds—these beds for the smaller rooms. But before doing so, I will, my lord, as succinctly as possible, call the attention of the gentlemen of the jury to this significant circumstance. I shall submit evidence which will prove beyond the shadow of a doubt, that of these one hundred and three beds at thirteen pounds apiece, supposed to have been delivered by Copland, and scheduled as an asset—as property actually in the hotel,—there were in sober fact delivered eighty-one beds, and no more. *Not* one hundred and three beds, but eighty-one beds. Twenty-two beds short, beds and mattresses. I pass on" . . .

Thus the endless web of words is spun out. And suddenly the judge asks a question.

"Why are you laboring all these details—what is the issue?"

O my lord, surely our details are strictly relevant to the issue, which is translucidly clear. We are fighting on this second Darmstadt prospectus and the statements contained therein. We contend that the values of the properties or assets put forward as an inducement to us to take shares were falsely exaggerated, and we therefore want our money back.

"Shall I go on, my lord?"

Dully Seymour wonders why the judge asks his question. Is it in order to keep the jury awake, or has he himself become tired and oblivious already?

. . . "Now I come to the end of these preposterous pictures. As I say, I shall, I think, succeed in showing that these three pictures alleged to be from the brush of Reynolds, Romney, and Gainsborough—worthless copies—really the most wretched daubs—are identical with three canvases entered at an auction sale, and knocked down amid the derision of the room for seventy shillings, sixty shillings, and thirty shillings;—how they came into Copland's possession, were sumptuously framed by him—to find their way to the Darmstadt Hotel, and figure as a purchase of three artistic gems at four thousand guineas each. . . . With difficulty I repress myself—but there is no necessity to dress forth the facts of the transaction. . . . Shall I venture to say this, without wounding the susceptibilities of my learned friend—or anybody else? To form a correct opinion of the value of such pictures, it is not necessary to have an eye trained by the personal ownership of galleries and saloons rich with the authentic work of these very masters. . . ."

Angry protest by eminent K.C., principal defendant's counsel; whispers in court; long-drawn breath of fashionable ladies —This is what we have come for. The mud is flying.

At the end of the first day Seymour went away in the company of his father-in-law. Daylight was gone—impossible to take snap-shots, but descriptive reporters could see "the Earl" get into the cab with "the man of straw."

Messrs. Killick and Mills had said it would be wise to sustain Mr. Copland's courage, to brace him up for this ordeal in the witness-box, and not unwise to keep an eye on him. But Seymour had quite other reasons for his attentive courtesy. The man of straw was his wife's father—that was a reason.

"This is very kind. Brentwood, my dear fellow, I am touched by this kindness. How do you think things are going? My man has not said one word—and your man seemed to me somewhat supine. Several times I fancied he could have intervened with good effect."

Lord and Lady Brentwood were not staying at Andover House. It had seemed to both of them that just now, for this visit to London, their own home would be insupportable.

They had taken rooms at one of the Charing Cross hotels, and thither Lord Brentwood conducted his connection-by-marriage.

Mr. Copland drank tea with his son and daughter, and accepted an invitation to return and dine with them. He was low-spirited at tea, but at dinner he seemed to be cheered by the food and wine; and after dinner, in Lady Brentwood's sitting-room, he discoursed with bright-eyed vivacity.

He was full of information about counsel—silk gowns and stuff gowns—and their reputed abilities. "In a sense, it is a very remarkable case, Gladys—Brentwood will endorse me—such a gathering of forensic talent. Sir Henry Gordon—who represents our old friend Malcomson—has been twice Solicitor-General. Then there's George Jefferies—the most merciless cross-examiner now in practice—fortunately on our side; Fargus Bull; and Pinfield, who, they say, is a future Lord Chancellor."

He explained that he was not a party to the case, but he was represented by counsel—two counsel.—"A watching brief, as it is termed. My men have high reputations. Brentwood's men have the highest reputations. It is really a tremendous muster. I should like you to see it, Gladys—if only for half an hour."

Listening to him, one might have supposed that he had been

in or about the Law Courts all his life, that he felt contented and at home there.

"Did you know, Brentwood, there is a very snug little grill-room round the corner at the bottom of the stairs? I lunched there today with Mr. Sykes, Killick's managing clerk, a very intelligent and amusing fellow. He stigmatizes Lamplough's claim as wasting the time of the court—a foregone conclusion. . . .

"Mr. Sykes heartened me enormously by something else he said. I must not attach too much weight to an opening speech. It is then that things are made to look black—as black as possible. But all of it can be washed out by the defence"; and Mr. Copland moistened his lips before he went on talking. "It was the duty of the man to-day to tint everything with a complexion of—er—what one must call hanky-panky. I have no fear of the result—I shall explain much, if I am allowed a chance of doing it."

To Seymour, silently listening, it was like everything else to-day, wonderful and dreamlike and disgusting. Did Copland know right from wrong? Did he in the least degree realize how black things were looking for him?

"Goodnight," said Mr. Copland cheerfully. "Or au revoir, my dear Brentwood, till we meet to-morrow in the same old place." And then he came trotting back for a last word. "Don't forget that little grill-room—in the luncheon interval. . . . But, pardon me, I have disturbed you—stupidly," and he shut the door again.

Papa, returning thus unexpectedly and looking into the sitting-room, obtained a too domestic glimpse. His daughter had moved from the chair by the fire, and was kneeling at her husband's feet. She was weeping, pressing his hand to her lips; and Seymour, with his arm round her waist, was lifting her from the ground.

"How kind and noble you are. Oh, how I worship you for your gentleness to my unhappy father."

"Gladys, my dear girl——"

"Let me go with you to-morrow—let me be there, by your side."

"No, no—not to be thought of."

"It breaks my heart. It is I who have brought all this trouble on you—through my father."

"No, your father didn't influence me. If anybody, it was Malcomson."

"But for me, you would never have known him. It is all my fault."

"No. It was nobody but myself. It was my own folly."

Seymour and his father-in-law had met again "in the same old place."

You climbed stairs to reach the place, but directly you were inside it you forgot, you could not believe that you were above ground. The longer you stayed in it, the firmer grew the impression of being sunk far down beneath the surface of the earth. Everything aided the impression—the airlessness, the lofty windowless walls, the disproportionate height, the remote glass, instead of a ceiling, dimly perceived above one's lifted head.

Compared with these depths, the tankish House of Lords might be a bright and airy upper chamber in a tower at the top of a mountain. This morning he thought the Lord Chief Justice's Court like a fantastic buried room, excavated and decorated by people who were confused in their recollections of rooms on the face of the earth. Latticed bookcases round the walls, reminiscent of a library; something suggestive of an old-fashioned inn bedroom about the Judge's bench and the dusty green curtains through which he went in and out; a monstrously too big clock, a vague memory of the clock at a railway station—these men had forgotten the daylight world when they made for themselves this deep-sunk temple of ceaseless talk.

He looked about him.—The men had forgotten daylight clothes: they wore wigs and gowns. They were an underground race, for ever banished from the sun's rays. Imagination could not enable one to see them employed otherwise than here: one could not perceive of them breathing good air, or riding fast across open fields. They had no color. Their

faces were like baked earth; their mobile mouths were like indiarubber; their swiftly turning eyes were like tarnished glass.

. . . "I shall, my lord, say little more about these presents —these extraordinary complimentary gifts offered to all and sundry who had the checking, the valuing, or the estimating, or the inventorying of all this mass of furniture—of this furniture." . . .

He looked about him.—There was no color anywhere. It was something to do with the atmosphere—a successful resistance to the filtration of the feebly descending light. Some brightly bound ledgers on the floor by Killick's feet were colorless. There was absolutely no color in the gaily dressed ladies clustered together in the judge's gallery. It was as if a dust storm had covered them.

. . . "Briefly recapitulating the evidence I propose to submit in this connection——"

"What was that word? Did you say—this invention?"

"Connection. This connection, my lord. In this connection . . ."

There were almost continuous interruptions. The tired voice of counsel was always being raised to repeat words or phrases. These underground men were all deaf.—But soon Seymour began to fail occasionally in hearing what was said. It was the deadness of the air—a heavy cotton-woolly medium through which sound penetrated with difficulty.

. . . "I shall call some of the clerks of the defendants' company—the clerks who checked and scrutinized the deliveries, the clerks who presented such documents for the examination down the schedules from the company's expert appraisers, and the clerks who presented such documents for the examination of the defendants themselves——"

"Not quite so fast, please. For the examination of? Who examined it?"

"The defendants, my lord."

"The defendants——"

How could the thing ever end, at this rate? It was endless.

. . . "Moreover, as I have told the gentlemen of the jury, I shall submit the evidence of this servant of the wholesale

furniture house which in part supplied Copland—and he will tell the story of Copland's present of two glass and silver decanters. The young man was surprised. It was not his birthday, nor his wedding day, and he asked what it was for. He will tell you that Copland assured him that the gift was a customary matter—a largesse of the company. But this witness, although at the moment he accepted the gift, thought it so extraordinary that on reflection he decided to return it . . ."

Seymour looked here and there—at the underground men. He felt that they were spiders weaving their webs about him—friends and foes alike were spinning the threads to tie him down. Their endless words were the endless threads with which they meant to bind and stifle him.

The long hand of the monstrous clock reached the half hour after one. Instantly—in the middle of a rambling sentence—the court rose. Seymour stood up, looked round, and seemed to meet the concentrated eyes of the world mutely interrogating him.

During the interval, he walked with Killick in the great hall; and if descriptive reporters watched him, they probably observed an agitated or unusually emphatic manner. He is making some sort of protest or anxious inquiry. Is his man—this famous Matthew Dering, K.C.—a man to be relied on? Does he really understand our case in all its bearings—can one trust him to understand everything?

Mr. Killick is pacifying his client. He assures Lord Brentwood that he is in safe hands.

But in court again, his disgust returns, grows more nauseating, is changing to dull anger. We have come to the witnesses now—an inexhaustible array of them. Clerks, servants, underlings are examined, and cross-examined, and re-examined. Now one sees what our famous counsel can do for us. It is his turn now. He is a large leaden-tinted man, with pendulous cheeks and hirsute brows; and, assuming a righteous indignation, he skirmishes heavily against the learned foe. The cross-examination is always the same—to exonerate Lord

Brentwood from responsibility; to show that he could not have been cognizant of any irregularities, if they existed; and yet to make the jury believe that Lord Brentwood was never negligent, but regularly attending to the business in an assiduous fashion.

. . . "And Lord Brentwood examined these schedules himself?"

"Yes, if they were put before him—it was mostly Mr. Waller or Mr. Tilney——"

"Don't introduce irrelevant information. Just answer my question."

"He is answering your question," says counsel for plaintiff.

Then there is bickering—what the more literary newspapers call "a scene," what unliterary newspapers call "a breeze between counsel." The breeze blows itself out, and then they go on again.

"Now, I am asking you about these schedules of January 18 and 23—the schedules D 3 and 4—you hold them there—they have just been handed to you—Those you now have. Please confine your attention to those. You told us just now, before my learned friend for the fifth or sixth time interrupted me——"

But the learned friend protests; the judge is appealed to for protection under such a savage attack; there is another stiffish breeze between counsel.

"You told us that document was submitted to the directors and signed. Look, and you will see the signatures."

"Yes."

"Is Lord Brentwood's name there?"

"Yes."

"Did he examine the document before signing it?"

"Yes."

"Carefully?"

"Yes—I think so."

"In short, so far as you observed, he examined it carefully and completely?"

"Yes."

Lord Brentwood writhed in the webs. He was tongue-

tied by the power of these glib and coarse-grained advocates —and his honor was at stake. He was ignored, pooh-poohed, overborne by these gross vulgarians—and his good name was being weighed by the world.

Disgust, profounder and profounder, sickened him: disgust of this crowded court, of the foul air, the somnolently staring jury, the hired speakers,—of his father-in-law; disgust of all this sordid business realm. They were all cheats at heart—not only Copland and Stuart and the others, but the accountants who should have seen and who knew that they were being paid not to see, the bankers who profited by the cash balances in their coffers,—all, all of them cheats. His dull anger was changing fast to hot revolt. Never had a proud prince blundered into such a fall from his high place in the world.

He spent the evening alone with his wife in the hotel sitting-room. He read again some of the innumerable letters that these days had brought him. A few were anonymous and abusive. The rest were from shareholders. They had been written by retired soldiers, country parsons, widows who entertained paying guests, and so on down the social scale to quite humble folk. Like Marlow, the writers all said they had risked their money on the faith of his good name. The letters altogether seemed to him to form a faintly heard cry for help from a great distance. Is it too late, my lord, to save us from the inevitable? For the sake of our blind faith in you, save your lordship's ruined but still obedient respectful servants.

While his wife sat pensively looking into the fire, he was smoothing and folding the letters.

He thought of the trial in that stuffy den of practiced hirelings, and of his trial in the open court of public opinion. At this moment, hundreds, thousands of men were talking of him. Scattered wide all over the kingdom, these critics of the streets and taverns were speaking his name. Carelessly—a few words; —then the talk turns to something else. He could hear the vulgar lips—"And that Lord Brentwood, he was on the make, same as the others. He don't know nothing now. Oh, no. But he knew a thing or two when he started. He wasn't in

it for 'is 'ealth—no blooming fear! I'd give the swab five years hard, for all 'e was a lord and a Member o' Government." These were the voices—scattered far and wide. But if you could collect them together, the voices would be a roaring volume of sound—from a multitude as great as ever gathered beneath a prince's windows to bellow scorn and rebellion.

Then he thought of all the men of his own class—how they would judge him. And then he thought of the few really big men of both political parties—they must, of course, be talking too. He thought of the grey old lords who held high office by right of birth, of the solemn commoners who had won it by force of merit. These should have been his peers—these were the men who in truth would try him. Only they were competent to form a court.

Anger and pride stirred him as he thought of them. They were immeasurably different from the abject business mob. They could handle millions of money, and nothing stuck to their strong, clean hands. He thought of the secrets they guard, the power they wield—of how they are given a pittance of five thousand a year and illimitable power, of how they retire into private life poorer, much poorer for the toil and the burden. They would understand—they would know that he could not lie or cheat. But how would they judge him as a leader of men—as a trusted prince, surrounded by treacherous, mud-stained lieutenants, conducting his faithful army into ambush and quagmire? They would suspend their judgment, but they would watch and listen with generous anxiety. In imagination he could hear *their* voices also—"Oh, I trust, I cannot doubt that Brentwood will cut himself clear from his ignoble associates. I am sure that he will have some really handsome answer to such ugly insinuations."

After all, these were his judges.

"Seymour, it is getting late."

He came to his wife's side, took her hand, and smiled at her tenderly.

"Seymour, your thoughts have been very sad. Can you tell me what you were thinking?"

"Nothing to distress or worry you. I was thinking—You

and I, Gladys, we are safest by ourselves—when we trust to ourselves and no one else."

It was on the third day, in the morning, when he began to tear the webs. His counsel was cross-examining as hitherto, and he stopped him.

"Stop," he said in a loud voice. "That's not true. I took no trouble. I ascertained nothing. . . . May I speak?"

People heard the loud voice without catching his words. There was whispering and commotion. His counsel were scandalized; all counsel looked pained and shocked; everybody endeavored to silence him.

"I want to say that the responsibility and the blame are not to be——"

All this was imperfectly heard in the unusual raised tones; and then he was somehow restrained and quieted. The judge, with a kindly seriousness, explained that he could not permit that sort of interruption; and he strongly advised Lord Brentwood in his own interests not to interfere with counsel who were there to represent him. It was another "scene" for the newspapers to describe: one of them spoke of "Lord Brentwood's extraordinary outburst of temper."

During the interval, he came through the assembled lunchers in the refreshment bar, surrounded by a bodyguard of his legal advisers. They led him out into the coolness and space of the big hall, to soothe and pacify him. Mr. Killick, vainly striving to subdue the excitability of his client, and noticing a sternness and grating tone in the client's voice, thought of the late Lord Collingbourne. These Charltons—even the best of them—were difficult, nearly impossible people to deal with. Killick told his client that he really must restrain himself, that he had offended his senior counsel, that the great Mr. Dering had in fact almost threatened to throw up his brief.

Presently, this famous K.C., with his mouth full, and a bitten sandwich in his right hand, came down the hall,—and to him munching, Lord Brentwood, quite unpacified, spoke sternly and straightly. Lord Brentwood said that his counsel was not asking proper questions.

"Surrounded by a bodyguard of his legal advisers."

"Not proper questions!" said counsel, plainly huffed. "Indeed—your opinion as to their propriety is perhaps——"

But members of the public, with ears pricked, were stupidly gaping at them. The legal bodyguard got Lord Brentwood into a dark adjacent corridor, and made resolute combined effort to squash him.

"Your opinion of what questions I should properly ask——"

Then, in the obscure gallery, Lord Brentwood dismissed his counsel from the case. The great man and the junior were both mightily huffed. Lord Brentwood, wrapped round with the shadowy gloom, and further wrapping himself in a mantle of dignity, spoke like the Cavalier King, to loyal but defeated generals after a battle. He had a melancholy smile for the bristling K.C., and his voice lost that stubborn, barking, Collingbourne tone.

"I know that you have endeavored to serve me faithfully and well—but you haven't quite understood."

"Not understood?"

"No. This is life or death to me—and you have treated it as if it was a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence."

The hearing was resumed, and Lord Brentwood's counsel is announcing that the retainer has been withdrawn from solicitors and they are therefore unable to proceed.

Oh—long inspiration of breath from aristocratic, stupidly gaping, fashionable ladies, who do not for a little while grasp the meaning of the announcement. They have it now—they make a dragging sound from crushed sleeves, and a sighing rustle with constricted petticoats. "Oh, my dear, let me smell your salts again. This *is* sensational." We all have the meaning now. Henceforth, reckless, romantically handsome Seymour Brentwood is to defend himself from the mud unaided.

The public interest is much enhanced—but things are not easy to follow. Counsel are talking. The judge is talking to Lord Brentwood, and he replies to something the judge says. In another minute Lord Brentwood is talking to a witness.

"Do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Did I ever offer you a bribe?"

"No."

"That is all. No other question."

It was curious to observe counsel. They were all horrified and scandalized, and they evinced sympathy and good feeling for their disbanded learned friends. Nevertheless, they looked at Lord Brentwood indulgently—as at an amusing and harmless lunatic.

But when he snapped out his question—"Did I offer you a bribe?"—to witness after witness, counsel hastily took up arms again. Sir Henry Gordon for Mr. Malcomson and Mr. George Jefferies for Mr. Tilney noisily intervened, fiercely protested. Counsel with watching brief for Mr. Copland, breaking rules and regulations, attempted to leap into the fray. All this might be excellent fun for Lord Brentwood, but it might be destruction for their clients. Lord Brentwood was implying that the innocent little presents were truly bribes. He was, by his untrained questions, saying in effect, "Did I do what the other people did? If so, I am guilty."

Not a moment to lose: this madman must be squashed. Counsel, bending over his shoulder, whispered agitatedly. Cannot he see—surely he can see that, if he persist, he will destroy his father-in-law without doing himself any good?

"Very well," said Lord Brentwood. "I'll have no more questioning."

Fourth day—and the acutest, most entrancingly delightful sensations had been reached.

"My lord, when may I speak?"

"What is it that you wish to ask me?"

"My lord, I wish to make a statement with regard to my position——"

"Stay, please. You have, I understand, deprived yourself of the assistance of counsel—and you wish to continue to conduct your case in person. Very good then—But now you

cannot make any speeches or statements until the plaintiff's case is concluded."

"When will the time come, my lord, for you to hear me?"

"Please sit down, Lord Brentwood"—The judge was urbanely considerate of manner. "The time for me to hear you will be at the conclusion of the case for the plaintiff. Then it will be for you to open your case for the defence. Very good then—But you understand, as I told you yesterday, you are entitled to cross-examine each witness—on the evidence he has given. That is to say, your questions are limited to—but as to that, I shall be able to give you any guidance necessary."

"Thank you, my lord."

The interest was intense. The news had flown—Lord Brentwood is conducting the case in person; his status has undergone sensational change: it is worth supporting suffocation to be here.

. . . "Now, Lord Brentwood, if you wish to avail yourself any questions in cross-examination."

"No questions, my lord."

His bodyguard had fallen away from him. He sat with a narrow empty space—full elbow-room—on each side of him. Mr. Killick was no longer in court. He had been here just now, and now he too was gone. Killick to-day seemed old and shaky. Things said to him by his self-directing client in a long interview yesterday evening had kept him awake throughout the night. He has been inexorably commanded to do many things, away from this court. He came, then, to take a last look at Lord Brentwood, who smiled and nodded at him. It was dreadful to Killick: like looking at a man about to drown within sight of land—nay, worse, a madman capering on a cliff, about to hurl himself over the edge, and grinning back at his keepers and warders. Mr. Killick took a last lingering glance, and disappeared in the dingy crowd by the door.

But Lord Brentwood, sitting alone, was comfortable and at ease. He needed no bodyguard. He only should decide what to say or do—only when trusting himself could he be safe.

. . . . "Now, Lord Brentwood, if you wish to avail yourself of your right—Any questions?"

"No questions, my lord."

Highest pitch of sensation yet attained.—

"My lord, may I speak now?"

"Yes, if you please, now is the time for you to open your case for the defence."

Suffocating, morbidly poignant interest. Oh, oh—short gasps for breath,—he has risen to address the court, to address the wide listening world.

"Now, Lord Brentwood."

Then he made his speech. No one had assisted him in its preparation; it was delivered without a single note; and it was the best speech of his life.

"My lord, this is not a defence, but a statement of my position. With regard to the claim of this shareholder—I am prepared to accept judgment for the plaintiff, subject to his making an absolute and unconditional withdrawal of his suggestion of fraud or intentional misrepresentation. I desire in the most emphatic manner to repudiate this unworthy imputation against my honor, and to put on record the solemn asseveration of my entire innocence of any base motives.

"But, my lord, beyond the plaintiff, there are all the other shareholders in this unlucky company of which I was the chairman and ostensible head. If I demand that they acquit me of fraud or want of honesty, I do not ask them to acquit me of ignorance and want of care. In this second respect—carelessness and ignorance,—I accept the fullest responsibility, I ask for no lenity. I shall make the only reparation possible to me. Fortunately I am a rich man—and I will give every penny I possess to the shareholders. I paid death duties on a little over two millions—and if I fetch what I am supposed to be worth, I shall realize enough to pay all the deficiency reported by the Official Receiver. Already I have issued the necessary orders, already the realization has begun.—The money, as it comes in, can be handed to the Official Receiver, or paid into

court, or dealt with, my lord, in whatever way may be proper" . . .

That was the end of the case.

Applause—not easily suppressed; sensation—expressed by shuffling of feet, rustling of petticoats, smelling of salts, and continuous whispering. A hurried consultation between counsel—and Mr. Lamplough's counsel, with exuberantly high-flown completeness, withdrew all charges, hints, or innuendoes against a noble defendant.

Suggested withdrawals seem now the rule—if we follow things correctly. The judge suggested that a juror should be withdrawn, and all the learned counsel gladly consented. The usher suggested that spectators should withdraw; and, while the judge was setting the form of the Order of the Court, the usher reiterated his suggestion.

It was nearly four o'clock; a stream of telegraph boys and messengers had rushed out, spreading the dramatic news through the corridors, and onward to the waiting crowd in the Strand.

A surging public formed his bodyguard, as Lord Brentwood came down the great hall. Shareholders, fine ladies, indifferently washed loafers, were inextricably mingled and borne along in the enthusiastic progress—all pressing on him, to shake hands with him, to touch the skirts of his invisible mantle. It is the last sensational scene—like some glorious historical episode that ought to have happened—like Charles the First coming through that other great hall of Westminster, acquitted by those regicides, restored to the loving hearts of his people.

A burst of frantic cheering in the muddy street, and he drives away in his cab.—But, to the eyes of the world, the cab is a triumphal car; and he sits so high that the mud will never reach him.

XLIX

A CHANCE had brought him the burden of unrequired wealth; and a chance had taken it away. Perhaps, unaided by chance, he would never have completely emancipated

himself from the futilities. Perhaps he might again and again have struggled upward to the light, and then have fallen back into the rubbish heap. But he was free of it now. He stood alone at last—or with one other by his side—in the full clear light.

For a little while longer he was troubled by a too attentive newspaper press. *"Noblesse Oblige"* in blackest, solidest capitals—that was a familiar head-line just then on fluttering newspaper bills, with such racy slangish additions as "The Earl pays the Score," and "Lord Brentwood will clean the Slate." He was the most popular man in England, the darling and hero of the loud-voiced public. The cheers he had heard outside the Law Courts were echoed in many parts of the town: wherever he drove through the streets, he was in peril of being recognized, of hearing more vocal choruses, of stopping the traffic, of requiring the police to extricate him from his noisy admirers. Crowds stood outside Andover House, refused to believe that he was not somewhere hidden within his voluntarily surrendered palace. In view of this popular excitement, one could not expect the newspapers to leave him alone. They gave their readers what they might truly have called "Special Brentwood numbers": portraits of him at all ages, sketches and photographs of the possessions he was renouncing—the picture gallery at Collingbourne Court, the docks at Stonehaven, the model cottages at Gridtown, etc. etc. They gave leading articles, chatty discursive articles, personally descriptive articles, philosophically reflective articles.—"Very often of late years the public has been confronted with the unedifying spectacle of a member of the peerage involving himself in unsuccessful commercial speculation and ultimate disaster"—one may imagine the sort of thing.—"But it has been reserved for this nobleman to exhibit such a lofty and chivalrous sense of duty, etc., etc. . . . Lord Brentwood has illustrated in the grandest manner the signification that he infers from those two words, Noblesse Oblige" . . . Few newspaper writers could start comfortably without using those two words; and, if started, they could not get on unless they fell back upon them. When Gladys, opening a paper, saw the two words, she knew that her husband's name

was coming, with still more praise—and she never tired of seeing the name and the praise. She was the happiest proudest woman in England—"though not very strong just now."

She approved of the nobly obliging renunciation—it was the message conveyed to him by her song; she could not take it back, and say she regretted that she had heedlessly sung to him. She gloried in the renunciation, and wanted even to have her part in it. He must resume legal ownership of his Yorkshire estate. It was not hers, but his of course, now as always. But it must at once be made his again legally, so that he might do what he pleased with his own. Perhaps he felt that he should renounce this too—the river and the plain and the castle walls must go with the rest, if he felt that he should not keep them.

He might give her rags to wear and crusts to eat, and she would say he was right, not wrong; they might starve together, if he said nobility obliged them, and her love for him and her pride in him would not falter or break.

But he firmly declined to allow her this quite unnecessary and undesirable sacrificial apotheosis.

"No. That is yours, not mine. It is a trust—a sacred trust now, for another as well as for yourself. Remember what I said to you when I created the trust—You were to guard it, and hold it, and never to let it slip away from you."

"Yes, but I said I would hold it for *you.*"

"You must hold it for yourself. Don't you see, it has made me strong and independent. If I hadn't known that you were at least secure, I should not have felt free to do what I wanted to do."

They would have hurried away from London, they certainly would not have lingered to eat a Christmas dinner in a dreary lodging-house sitting-room, but for one unfortunate business matter that remained outstanding and unsettled. They had wound up their own affairs to the satisfaction of themselves and the world, and they would have been perfectly happy, but for somebody else's affairs, as yet unregulated. There was sadness —deep sadness—still to be lived through by Gladys. As a shadow from a dark cloud, marring the brightness of a sunlit

landscape, there came the darkening fear of the dangers and difficulties of Papa.

In the midst of the cheering and newspaper-writing, Mr. Copland had modestly disappeared from the public gaze. Perhaps his intelligent friend, Mr. Sykes, managing clerk to Killick & Mills, dropped ominous hints at their last luncheon in that snug little grill-room. Sykes may have plainly stated that things were not going well—were indeed assuming the blackest aspect, however you looked at them. That which the senior partner so much dreaded has come to pass; a vindictive plaintiff has proved nothing against principal defendant; his barbed arrows and wildly slung missiles could never have pierced knightly armor, even if the battle had been fought out to the bitter end; but these fierce wide-aimed discharges have penetrated a meaner breast. As we dreaded, an up-armed squire outside the lists totters and falls, grievously stricken. Using Mr. Killick's professional simile—Lamplough has landed the furniture man in Queer Street.

Not one hundred and three beds,—and the preposterous masterpieces, and other labored details—can a son-in-law's chivalrous magnanimity obliterate all sequel to such a gloomy tale? The world at large thinks that Lord Brentwood has fairly paid all scores and cleaned the slate. It would be unkind to his lordship if a reckoning were demanded of another. But twenty-two beds—*and* mattresses! It is too much—justice must take its course. Did Copland notice the unostentatious, faultlessly attired gentleman who dropped into court so quietly, who smiled and bowed to the judge, who unobtrusively listened to some of the evidence, while solicitors' clerks nudged one another and glanced meaningly? Did anyone point him out to Mr. Copland, and whisper the dreadful official name of him—Director of Public Prosecutions?

Be all that as it may, Mr. Copland is not to be found when people begin to look for him. Not at the shop, not at his rooms in Hanover Street, not anywhere in the great town. A warrant has been issued for his arrest, and he has fled. Killick hopes that it may not be a tentative, feeble, half-hearted flight, but that he has got clean away. The authorities will not perhaps

send after him; they will make no merciless hunt for him in distant lands; they never want to hear of him again. You may know that they didn't really want to catch him, or they wouldn't have given him so much time for packing and ticket-buying.

Vain hopes, of Killick and other well-wishers.—Mr. Copland is feeble and half-hearted, has wasted several days in attempting to persuade disloyal Miss Vincent to return to her secretarial allegiance, and go with him as right hand and travelling companion. He gets no farther than Liverpool—where the arrest is effected. As he tells officers of the law, he was ignorant of this new prosecution, and had planned a Californian trip—visit to his son Schiller; but he is glad to be afforded an opportunity of meeting all charges. Thus he is carried back to spend Christmas in London, to be brought before Magistrate, to be committed for trial, to be let out on bail, etc.

Everything possible will be done for him. It is hoped that the prestige and popularity of Lord Brentwood may yet save him. Surely no injury will convict a close connection by marriage of the hero of the hour.

Although this item of news did not reach our parliamentary correspondents until long afterwards, it was known by Christmas to well-informed political circles that Lord Brentwood had been offered a seat in the Cabinet. He was not more popular with the mob than with the rulers of his Party. All that had made him valuable seemed to be torn away, and yet they wanted him. The power of providing evening-receptions had gone from him for ever, and yet they craved to have him among them. They thought now, it seemed, that the man himself, bereft of his splendid outward trappings, would be worth his place at the Cabinet table. One of them said it was a pleasure to make room for him. White-haired venerable Knavesmere, hastening his intended retirement, vacated the Lord Custodiership; and the Prime Minister formally invited Seymour Brentwood to take the vacant post.

No wire-pulling Sir William or any other highly sensitized intermediaries this time, but unintercepted open communication with the chieftain—briefly direct holographic letter, asking if

it will suit the convenience of "My dear Brentwood" to join us as Lord Custodier.

And, in reply, somewhat more lengthy holograph from our dear Brentwood, saying that he is very sensible of the honor done him by the offer, but he finds himself for many reasons unable to accept the offer.

What could the reasons be? Whimsical, irrational, minor-poetical reasons they must indeed be—not a business-like reason among the lot. He had denuded himself of all visible means of subsistence; he had given, or was pledged to give everything—even his half share in Schiller's fruit gardens, even the life interest in that three hundred a year left to him by his mother. And the post of Custodier, though considered as a grand ornamental office, has this much that is substantial attached to it: the holder gets a salary of three thousand per annum. Yet Seymour turned his back on post and wage, as if both alike were futilities. He was penniless, he had no work to do, he wished to work—and yet he refused an income of three thousand pounds for doing practically nothing.

Curiously enough, too, it was something of the kind of post that he really desired to obtain. Trying to explain his reasons for the refusal, he spoke to Gladys with a hesitating vagueness of this other post that he was looking out for. It was, he said, not yet unoccupied; but it was the same sort of thing—only with some real work, and not sham work, to be done,—another custodiership, held by another whitehaired old man who has served long and well, and who will probably be glad to retire if a painstaking successor can be appointed.

"It has been in my thought, Gladys—that I might venture to apply for it. I should like it. I wonder if I may venture."

"I am sure you may. I don't believe they would deny you anything."

"But this is quite a personal matter. Not a Party office—not in the gift of the Government."

"In the gift of the King?"

"No. In your gift. . . . Gladys, will you make me the Bailiff of Dykefield Castle? I promise to serve you with all my heart and with all my strength."

L

SEEING it for the first time, she had said, "This is where I should like to live, the world forgetting, by the world forgot"; and now her wish was accomplished. She lived with her husband in her far-off castle, and the world troubled them no more.

He was working under the supervision of bluff old Mallock, the out-going bailiff. He was learning the duties of his custodiership, learning the contours of the land and the faces of the tenantry. Tutor and pupil rode widely and long and often—to the edge of the moor, where the heather fought the pasture, and conquered unless one burned and drove it back; to the lowest dips of the plain, where the river needed strong bridles, and was quick to scour in triumph over one's undiked fields. Great things, real things, were talked of, as the in-coming and out-going bailiffs rode together through the brief winter daylight. Small things too, but always real things, came into the lessons taught.—This cottage of the West Walk herd—how small a thing; transparently small, since the weather has made holes, and one can see through and through it. Shall we patch it again, or build anew? Let us try to build. "'Twas so small a thing, my lord, that I couldn't be writing to you or my lady in London about it. But I hoped I'd one day get leave from you to build him another."

White-haired Mallock, with his loud North-country voice and uncourtly manner, takes these rides as if in a happy dream. All this is the realization of many day-dreams—vouched for by Mrs. Grange of the Bailiff's house. "That's true—father's dream when I was no taller than my Cicely. 'Surely to goodness,' he used to say, 'some when or other, the lord would come to live on the land and take some interest.'"

And at last the dream is turning real. What the land yields of food is to be eaten on the land; what the land brings of money will remain on the land. An apt pupil grasps Mallock's practical plans, tints them with imaginative hues, and will make them larger as well as prettier. He will drain and build and

dike—will challenge comparison with that William, the Third or the Conqueror, who made Great Dyke or William's Dyke as a pattern for posterity. He will certainly reach, if he can, the climax of Mallock's life-dream, and dike the land "up to moor, winning the cost ten times over by the betterment of the soil."

Soon now the old bailiff needs no longer to ride afield. He might smoke pipes of pensioned leisure in the Bailiff's house, from which no one will banish him; or stand with slippered feet before his door when his grand-daughter is trotting away to school; or sit on the bench beneath the big gate, and gossip with the first Spring tourists straggling in to see the castle. The new bailiff was out and about by himself: he was working hard all day, he was sleeping soundly at night.

The world was rapidly forgetting them. The newspapers had done with Seymour Brentwood as a sensational headline, a salient feature, and even as an item of news. Nothing lasts—the search-light of publicity had been turned on him, and now it was turned off again. He was no good as news, and newspapers could not even use him and his wife in *Society's Movements,* because they had ceased to move. They were at rest.

Fashionable Intelligence had done with him. Indeed, what can Fashionable Intelligence ever have to do with Quixotic Madness? The most fashionably intelligent part of polite society said he was mad—an intractable, hare-brained creature not worth serious consideration.

His own family had done with him. They also said he was mad—said they had known it all along. Half-brother to mad Collingbourne—what else could you expect? He had exactly followed in his brother-madman's crazily divergent footsteps—he, too, had married a barmaid. He should have been straight-waistcoated and shut up *then*—not been left at large to do this gigantic mischief.

The family made their last concerted essay after his speech at the trial. Each and all appealed to him in the name of the family. Think of the family—think of us—think of your

children, supposing you ever have any. In the name of an unborn Brentwood, we implore you to renounce this cracked idea of renunciation. If it is not too late, for the sake of reason, stop.

Only one member of the whole family stood out from the combined attempt, and remained stupidly quiescent. But perhaps Lady Emily, if the truth could be known, was as mad as either of her brothers. She wrote to "Dearest Seymour," saying admiringly yet plaintively, "This is terrible, but I suppose it is necessary, or you would not have decided to do it. I think it is very grand and like yourself."

She wrote to "My dearest Gladys" with the kindly, cheerful tone appropriate to an old-fashioned spinster addressing a young matron in a delicate state of health. Lady Emily will not start for Bordighera until she has paid her anticipated visit to Dykefield, and performed her ceremonious duty at that crumbling Norman font in the castle chapel. She considers Gladys Emily very nice names. When her little god-child grows old enough to wear jewels, she shall have trinkets and gewgaws—some of those pretty things that kind Aunt Emily values because they once adorned her mother.

Kind words from Lady Emily—but silence from the others. Much from her—nothing from all the rest of them. No penny cards at Christmas—not one sixpenny telegram of congratulation when the first of those defrauded, *cheated* infants comes into the world. The family, as a family that respected itself, left Cousin Brentwood alone for all time. His money had gone, his father-in-law was in prison—Let us keep his name out of our nurseries and schoolrooms. Tell governesses that we never speak of him. The whole thing is too sad and tragic for words. We wish young people to learn as little as possible concerning this mad relative, his barmaid wife, and her jailbird father.

All endeavors to save Mr. Copland were unavailing. Nothing could save him——influence and prestige of Seymour, admiring memory of self-sacrifice, cunningest solicitors, sharpest of advocates,—nothing availed. He went down, into darkness

—among those twenty-two beds *and* mattresses. We are taking consideration of the fact that you are an old man, and the fact that, by reason of the munificent generosity of a connection of yours, no one is now suffering material detriment from your fraud—Thus sounded the voice of doom in foggy, muddy January. We understand this latter fact to have been in the minds of the jury when they made what is tantamount to a recommendation to mercy. But we cannot say less than this—Two years in the second division.

The judge was unable to say less, and he was unable to do more to show his genuine respect for a prisoner's connections by marriage.

The prisoner then was in, and the toil was now to get him out. Seymour's endeavors were ceaseless. Could not, and would not, the Home Secretary think this a case where justice vindicated might change to unhesitating mercy? The prisoner is an old, old man; his health is breaking fast; he is always at the prison infirmary. Here are doctors' reports or certificates—bronchial asthma, asthmatic bronchitis, feebleness of circulation, general debility, etc. etc. He really is very ill. It cannot be that you want him to die in prison. After all, the judge did not pass a death sentence. Yet death is the penalty that you seem to wish to inflict. Cannot you let him out?

Seymour was indefatigable in these endeavors; and at last there seemed hope of success. Yes—we are disposed to strain a point. But do not be in *quite* such a hurry. We also have doctors' reports, and they are far less alarming than yours. On the whole, we take a favorable view of the patient's stamina, and we are under no apprehension that the imprisonment will have a fatal termination. Shall we hint that after another month or two, we will see if we cannot then open our prison doors?

But now comes a question that may not be shirked, that must be answered. When Mr. Copland is got out, what is he to do, where is he to go? A shaky, broken-down, muddled old swindler, cast out, friendless, on a mercilessly hard world—a poor old owl, trapped, half plucked, caged in suitable darkness, and then sent flying on feeble featherless wings through the

cruel sunlight,—what chance can there be for either? If one thinks of it, perhaps one should not have tried so hard. Perhaps the prison was the safest, properest, best place for A. W. Copland.

Gladys looked at her husband, piteously and sadly striving to find a happy answer for such a question as this. Where, oh, where can poor papa go for the remnant of his days, where can he creep to hide himself, where can he ever find again shelter and kindness?

"He must come here, Gladys."

Here—to Dykefield—nowhere else. He can live in the Bailiff's house, as a profitable lodger. Mrs. Grange will be pleased to have the lodger; old Mallock will enjoy his company, indeed wants a companion to yarn with over his pipe at the evening fireside. Mallock and Mrs. Grange have both said this—really enthusiastically. Papa will be comfortable in the Bailiff's house; and, as often as he cares to do so, he can walk through the archway, across the garden court, to the Family house, and dine with his son and daughter as a garrulous, still honored guest.

"O Seymour, do you really mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. I shall like to know that he is safe, well cared for—with those who"—and Lord Brentwood set his lips and made a gulp, as if he had been taking a dose of good but nasty medicine—"who are fond of him."

LI

SEYMOUR had lost one fortune, and had come into another fortune. His loss was money; his gain was time. But, as he thought, money is valueless: time is the only possession that reasoning men should call wealth. He had sufficient time now for everything—time to work all day in the fields; and yet time for reading, writing, thinking; and, above all else, time for love. He could scarce understand it. While he was hurrying to and fro, piling up the futilities, he had not a moment to

spare—he felt bankrupt in time. Now he felt that he would never run short of it. And this is the difference between reality and futility, between true work and sham work. A man will easily and contentedly construct a mile of railway, fight a campaign, or rescue some ice-bound explorers at the North Pole, while another is laboriously and painfully getting up a Hunt Ball, adjusting the dispute of the squire and the parson, or tracing the thief who robbed the orchard of half a bushel of apples—and that is because the first is solid work, and the second is futility.

Then freely spending this new fortune, Seymour managed his wife's estate wisely and well. He reclaimed her yellow marshes, he drove back her purple moors, he wrestled with her silvery snakish foe, the treacherous river. He made embankments, sluices, dikes, and culverts for her; he won dry ground, firm pasture, fair crops for her out of quag and chaos; he built houses and schools for her; he guarded and trained and taught her people committed to his charge. And thence onward, through the years, this was his full and yet leisured life.

Ample time for the bailiff's task, and time for all else.—He wrote again: minor poetry of a firm but musical note, letters to *The Times,* long articles for the reviews. He had found time at last really to look after those four sons of his brother, to play his promised part of guardian and adviser with purpose and effect. He supplemented his gift of cash with prudent oversight and affectionate regard. Now and then—at rare intervals—he went to London to vote or speak on some great measure in the Lords. Only the great measures drew him from north to south, from the strong air to the weak—Bills for the arming of the nation, Bills for the feeding of the hungry children, Bills for the improvement of the common lot,—the *real* work of Parliament. On such occasions, he delivered carefully prepared speeches; but the preparation was very different from Irene's excited promptings. These orations were based on a winter's quiet thought, and he always secured attentive listeners. When he said "If I weary you, my lords," the courteous "No, No" sounded in front of him and behind him, from both sides, and had an unmistakably hearty ring. Both sides

liked him and respected him, and with their jolly salvoes of No, No, they seemed to be saying: "You never weary us. You don't come here often enough. Go on—now you *are* up from the country. We'll make a night of it with you, if you want a parliamentary lark."

Twice at least in the year, Lady Emily paid a visit to the Castle. Spring and autumn were her favorite seasons for the trip, but the date was sometimes altered to meet the convenience of the Castle lady. Aunt Emily by postponement might combine a ceremonious duty with mere family pleasure—or would she come three times this year instead of twice? Lady Emily said she would postpone this particular autumn visit until dear Gladys was ready for her by the Norman font. She was wanted at the font again, and again, and yet once again. She used to write to Dearest Seymour with gratified facetiousness, faulty grammar, and deficient punctuation. "You asking me to be godmother again to this second one makes me think you have mercenary expectations and it is not me you want for your young people but some of my money when I am gone." The kind soul thought this to be a mildly brilliant jest, because she held that Seymour had irrefutably proved himself devoid of the money-grubber's instinct. He did not care for money—there lay the goodness of her joke. She wrote to Dearest Gladys in another vein. "If this one is a boy I shall make him my heir. And then if there is another boy I shall divide it between the two and so on. I should be afraid to tell Seymour this for fear of him forbidding me to be godmamma again. But I tell you because I think it is proper you should know. He has already most nobly provided for my own brother's sons, so it is right for me to think only of his."

Thus Lady Emily, as far as lies in her power, will try to repair the gigantic family mischief. If it be a boy, the little defrauded Collingbourne may be assured that he will never have to beg his bread. Thanks to an economical tender-hearted godmamma, he shall have enough to buy himself a gilt coronet and fur-trimmed cloak to wear at Westminster, even if he can never afford to ride there in a state coach.

"Give a kiss to little Colley," she wrote from London, after

paying the postponed visit, "and promise him that while I am abroad, I shall look out for some nice presents for my baby godson. And a thousand thanks to dear Seymour for sending me such a wonderfully complete itinerary of my Italian journey with the maps and all that information about the hotels. It will save us endless trouble, but he must have spent hours in making it all out, and I feel very guilty for having wasted so much of his time."

All saw this new wealth of the bailiff, and how ungrudgingly he would spend it for one. Farmers, parsons, schoolmasters, servants, children, all drew on him; and he paid out with a smile. Five minutes, half an hour, hours—you could not bother him by your demand: he was so rich.

Old Copland drew on him heavily, and he always honored the draft—was always ready to talk, or rather to listen, to his talkative father-in-law. Not much longer would Copland cause him to spend his minutes. Then let us spend them now —as many as the poor old man asks for.

With a surprising adaptability, Mr. Copland had settled down into his snug rooms at the bailiff's house. The castle suited him—something grandiose and boastful in the very name of Castle was grateful to him; the fine air suited him; the deferential attention of Mrs. Grange charmed him; and the jovial company of Mr. Mallock—"a man of the shrewdest intelligence, but totally unversed in the life of cities"—was an unfailing solace and delight. He was never tired of talking to Mallock, and Mallock displayed immense strength as an auditor.

To Mallock, to the daughter of the gate-house dame, to gardeners, villagers, to tourists—to all who would listen, Mr. Copland would and did talk. Soon everybody in the red-roofed town knew the old Castle-gentleman. Soon it was difficult to think that the castle had ever been without this well-dressed, chatty, and urbane guest.

He looked quite a distinguished old buck, in his Tyrolean hat, violet silk muffler, fur coat and white gloves, as he waited at the porch for the bath chair and stout pony that used to take him down the hill for his morning perambulation; and

his flourishing bows to clergyman or clerk, as he passed through the narrow street, were examples of a grand style of courtesy that is rare in this decadent age. He and his pony lingered every day outside the old curiosity and furniture shop next the post office. Mr. Wamsley, the curio-dealer, was a listener who never grew weary: it was an honor to hear the lightest words of the great Mr. Copland—late of Oxford Street, London. Mr. Copland, leaving his bath chair, often sat and chatted in the shop itself, overhauled its scanty contents, gave an expert opinion on every article—from a margin-trimmed, foxy engraving, to a three-cornered, fatally damaged washing-stand. Gladys had some slight reason to believe that Papa became a secret backer of Mr. Wamsley and his funny little shop. Certainly, since Papa's advent, the shop seemed to have burst into unusual enterprise and vigor: the stock grew larger and larger: new and special lines were frequently introduced. And Papa, when he came to dinner, seemed often to be insidiously pushing the shop wares.

"Gladys, my dear, I—ah—'appened to be passing Wamsley's this morning—and was struck, really struck, by some Sheffield plate he has picked up—soup tureen and sauce boats. I told him frankly I considered them cheap"; and Papa coughed. "Ah—'e also 'ad a little bit of 'Oniton lace——"

Papa used to drop his h's now—and whatever his faults, this was not one of them in the past. But now he was old and feeble; there could be no doubt that his health was really broken. He was asthmatic. He would have been short of breath even if he had not talked so much; and, talking incessantly, he could not muster strength for what in philological terms is called "the hard breathing." By the time he got to the end of a long sentence, and especially if he coughed, bang went all the h's. Gladys winced when she first missed the expected aspirate: she was so anxious that dear Papa, sitting at dinner in the Family house, should always appear at his very best—particularly when, as now, the Reverend Mr. Finlake, with all his Oxford education, was of the party. She looked at her husband anxiously.

But Seymour did not mind. He had reached a plane of

thought higher than that whereon such little things can sting and torment a man. Or, in more homely phrase, he had bravely swallowed his stiff dose of medicine, and his stomach would not be turned by the faint aftertaste of it. Mr. Copland might come to dinner as often as he cared, and drop as many h's as he chose.

He did not come too often—and never without explicit invitation. Once he came on four consecutive nights—but that was during the short visit to the castle of Mr. and Mrs. Reed of Brisbane. The host supported the society of these Colonial visitors with unruffled composure. Mr. Reed was a plain sensible man, very easy to entertain—because he knew something about sheep-farming, and enjoyed riding over the moor to see the last six acres of reclaimed pasture. Mrs. Reed was the sister of Gladys—when that was remembered, one had successfully lifted her to the higher plane of thought, far, far beyond the range of ordinary criticism.

Of all the people with whom Mr. Copland talked, the one preferred by him was Seymour—above all of them—even the little furniture man and secret partner or protégé. He was fond of his son-in-law: was intensely grateful for the manner in which the "dear fellow" had stood by him throughout "those law difficulties." Far from exhibiting any repugnance for frank discussion of his catastrophe, he constantly recurred to the topic.

"You stood by me grandly—But, by Jove, what a mess we made of it, didn't we?" He never seemed really to understand the precise reason of Seymour's monetary sacrifice, or of his own punishment; he never seemed ethically comprehensive of a well-marked difference between right and wrong. "We were hard hit, both of us, by Jingo. The death of our old friend, Sir Gregory, knocked the legs from under me, and down I went —must go down. What a man that was, Brent! Such a brain—and a heart of gold. You may be sure of this: if Stuart had not been taken from us by death, he would have pulled us through—both of us, Brent—both of us."

He called his son-in-law Brent now—an affectionate curtailment, a pet name.

. . . "Listen to me, Brent—no defence of Schiller's conduct. I cannot admit any. The boy has been a disappointment to me. If you magnanimously pardon it, *I* cannot condone his behavior. Gladys is exceedingly angry with him for selling his half share in the estate. You put him out there, in those gardens and, ah, groves, to provide him with occupation—'ealthy occupation—to give him an established position—and to develop the estate to the utmost capacity. You never intended him to turn it into cash, and go off with the proceeds—to tempt luck elsewhere. Gladys and *I* are excessively angry. Schiller has disappointed us—and not for the first time. . . .

. . . . "But this is life, Brent, and I make no complaint of it. Let me tell you, that when you get to my age, you too will be something of a philosopher. Here is a maxim for you. When a man is down, the world thinks he never can get up again. . . .

. . . "Look at me—I don't admit that I am done with—don't feel I'm done with—that is, if I could get a lucky turn. This cough is nothing. Say I throw it off with the warm weather—Dr. Irwin assures me I may—I have a very good opinion of Dr. Irwin. Then I say—if I could get a helping hand—I am ready to start again. Brent, I could do it. I needn't go to London. London is not what it was—London may be played out—for me, at any rate. No, I'd open in York—not necessarily under my own name—a tip-top furniture emporium. Why, bless my soul, I'd almost guarantee in two years to have branches at Leeds, Hull, and, ah, every big town in Yorkshire."

He was feebler this autumn. He was fast fading. Yet he was bright-eyed as ever, sanguine as a child, indomitable.

. . . . "Very pleasant day—treat to be alive on days like this." In the warm spring weather of another year, Mr. Copland's drafts on Seymour's time became heavier—but they all were met and honored. Lord Brentwood now was walking beside the bath chair, through the village street. "And what a view that is, Brent!"

At the bottom of the narrow street, one looked across the widening plain to a distant blue vapor, in which sky and earth

met and mingled. Mr. Copland pointed with a shaky hand; and then something in the view displeased him—something of too great space, of immensity stretched out with ill-defined limits and rolling in all directions into dim uncertainty.

"Very pretty, Brent—but, ah, *cheerless*. Turn the pony's head—let's go back. I like the street and the shops best. Always gaiety in a street—more life in a street!

"What were we talking of, before we turned? Oh, yes. I was telling you, Brent, of the Paris Exposition of '79. . . . Well, the 'ope of all was to get the central space. . . . One thing leads to another. There was a little 'anky-panky in this, you know." . . .

Alas, as Brent knew, with or without the h, there had been too much 'anky-panky in Copland's long, and now closing career.

Best of all things, highest boon brought to him by his new fortune—time for the love of his wife. Day after day, throughout the years, she sustained and gladdened him, gave him strength and peace.

She was in her right place now—among the realities, far from the shadow dance in which she seemed to trip and fall. She never failed him now: in public as in private, he was satisfied with her. She knew what to say and what to do when distributing prizes at the village school, although she had been shy and inefficient when opening bazaars for strangers in aid of fashionable unknown charities. And this was because she felt herself safe here, on firm ground, in the midst of her own people, who found no fault with her.

There, she had been called upon to act a part in a meaningless pageant, among actors and actresses who perhaps thought there was no meaning in life itself.

His love was very great. In every waking hour, whatever he might be doing, he was conscious of a deep steadfast joy in her, as companion, wife, and mother of his children. His love blended her and them together—she was the source of the light itself, and they were its lesser rays. When he sat alone at his desk and she appeared, the dark old room brightened as if really and truly the sunshine had burst in upon him, or the flame of

the lamps had burned higher and clearer. When he went about her work to the ends of her land, he carried with him, if not the light, at least some of its warming radiance. Her spirit was with him, wherever he went.

He could admire her still, as well as love her. She was pretty as ever—slim and girlish, graceful and sweet and fresh. —And she will not change. This is how she will be always,—because he will see her always with eyes that cannot record a change. It is a thought that he never analyzes, refuses to understand, will never test to his dying day. The wife he sees is the woman that others see. This is an indisputable, unassailable truth, not a poet's foolish fancy. The years have not touched her: outwardly as well as inwardly, she cannot change.

LII

THE happy peaceful years were slowly gliding—not racing away from them.

They looked down from their castle walls, and it was as if he held the inverted glass that he had used when a child at the play. The glass made all things small; but a turn of the glass made things big again. They saw the fertile plain, and the bailiff's work—houses, bridges, and dikes,—men like ants toiling, but with purpose in their toil. And though so small, so far off, these toilers and he were as one—bound together in the common task, united by sympathy. He could turn the glass and bring them near. In imagination he could join them. In imagination they could join him. Miles away across the fields, peasants on the edge of the moor shaded their eyes, and looked at the castle—with love.

Centuries had rolled by, and no serf had so looked at the castle. Grand and wonderful things had happened at Dykefield.—It had stood sieges; it had helped to break rebellious hopes; it had taught loyalty with axes, and religion with flames; maidens had been done to death in it, monks had gone mad in it, sovereigns had slept in it;—but never till now had this

thing happened. Its serf, staring at it over the ripe corn and the cropt pasture, felt his heart grow warmer and his eyes soften, as he thought that the man who lived behind the stone walls was his best friend.

They looked from their castle walls at the far-off world of fashion, and it was as if he used the inverted glass given to him when a man by Gladys. Ants on a restricted ant-heap, —moving restlessly, ceaselessly,—without purpose striving,— burying themselves. Fussy foolish little people.—He could not turn the glass and bring them near and make them large. He could not in imagination sympathize with them; he had lost the power of understanding them.

They read of this infinitely remote world as they sat side by side in a lamp-lit room, and the printed words stirred their memories vaguely, but could not flash a strong thought-picture to their minds. The mental presentment was blurred and shadowy, never bright and clear.

They read—in the Fashionable Intelligence that cared no more for them—of the Darmstadt Hotel, its major-domo, and its titled guests. "Monsieur Girasol, yielding to the wishes of his clientele, has this season introduced a popular innovation in the shape of a ten and sixpenny dinner, served to music in the oriental banqueting hall. Amongst those lately partaking of this recherché repast have been the Duke of Newport, Lady Edward Hernshaw, etc., etc. . . . Monsieur Girasol has deserved and already attained such a reputation for the studied and refined elegance of his menus, that it goes without saying the new Darmstadt dinner will be a phenomenal success." Memory, sluggishly stirring, suggested to Seymour that Girasol wrote all that rubbish himself. The other scoundrel—what was his name?—Nicolas—used to be the author of exactly similar paragraphs. But the banqueting hall? That must be the room in which the annual lies were told to the shareholders.

In Fashionable Intelligence they read also of a party at Andover House, and their memories made them laugh. "Last night Andover House was *en féte,* the occasion being Mrs. Baumer-Prentice's second evening-party." It was exactly like

a Gladys party—and yet the mental presentment was only just strong enough to make them laugh at it. "Mrs. Baumer-Prentice received her guests at the head of the grand staircase, and they passed on to the suite of reception rooms, which were tastefully decorated with roses and malmaisons. . . . Drayton's white orchestra played in the gallery. . . . Supper at separate tables was provided till a late hour in the library and the adjoining apartments." Who had been engaged by this good Massachusetts lady to do the party for her? Memory, working faster, supplied the probable name of Marlow. Let us hope that he will not corrupt or lead astray his employer—let us trust that Mrs. Baumer-Prentice is fat and old, and safe from temptation. Mr. Marlow is a dangerous ally.

Twice the printed words spoke of Irene. Once they read of her in Sensational News, and once in Fashionable Intelligence.

Our Monte Carlo correspondent telegraphs that Miss Malcomson, a young lady of independent means and well known in London Society, yesterday attempted suicide. She has attracted considerable attention during her stay in the principality, both by the splendor of her costumes and her daring play at the tables. This morning she was found unconscious in her bedroom at the Hotel de Paris, and it was at first thought that the young lady had inadvertently taken an overdose of the morphia prescribed by doctors as a cure for her sleeplessness. But a letter from the young lady herself contained the painful announcement that she was tired of life, and had overdosed on purpose. There is no more to this Monte Carlo sensation.—The morphia has not killed the young lady: she will soon be well enough for Casino authorities to escort her to a railway carriage. That is all.—Fleet Street for a moment directs its great search-light upon Irene, and now she is again in darkness.

Then once more she is seen, but less vividly—by the Fashionably Intelligent:—

> "A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between the Honorable Reginald Papworth, second son of Lord Sunningdale, and Miss Irene Malcomson, youngest daughter of the late Lionel Malcomson, Esq."

Tourists came to the castle as of old. It had been so long a

show-place that one could not without unkindness shut its gates against the tourist herd. Thus, on drowsy summer afternoons, its courts echoed to the tread of many footsteps; and from the garden terrace, you could hear the sound of strange voices mingling with the murmur of bees in the flower border, the faint song of haymakers in the meadows, the puff and rattle of a distant train. The tourists, conversationally buzzing as they moved, were like a swarm of bluebottle flies—rather a nuisance, but not really doing any harm.

. . . "This is the great hall. Very old, Fourteenth Century. Except the Minstrel Gallery—of much later date." The daughter of the gate-house, now a buxom matron, leads each swarm of buzzing flies, and tells them the tale of the castle. "Look up, ladies and gentlemen, to the small hole or orifice in the roof—the only chimney provided by the architects of those days. The fire was laid on the floor here, where I'm standing. . . . This way, please. Follow me, ladies and gentlemen. . . . The chapel—Very old indeed. Font and arches all Norman."

"Can you tell me if the family are in residence?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, the family are always here. They've made it their perm'nent home like. . . . Yes, sir, that's the chain that held the Bible. . . . Follow me, please."

"Can one see the apartments used by the family?"

"That's what we call the Family house—not shown. . . . Yes, miss, you can have a peep into the garden court. But you'll understand, the family must keep something for their own use like."

It is curious, but what the tourists want to see—far more than dungeons, towers, or chained Bibles—is the family itself. That is a universal trait of tourists, at home or abroad. They will turn with eager alacrity from the portraits of twenty dead princes painted by master hands, to gape at one little live prince carried by a nursemaid.

"Now, if you please, ladies and gentlemen, follow me." . . .

But a few inquisitive flies have buzzed through the archway into the garden court. A delightful peep for tourists, better than any painted picture—Yew trees throwing cool shade on a stone-flagged path, bright sunshine, gay flowers, smooth grass,

basket chairs and a tea table; and beyond this pretty foreground, no background of any kind—just the open unmeasured space of a summer sky. And more gratifying to tourists than these scenic accessories, better worth gaping at than sundial or tree or sky, here surely are those choice human flowers, the juvenile family! Yes, no doubt of it—a schoolboy reclining in holiday sloth, a long-legged, black-stockinged sister, a sturdy small brother; and a fair-haired little sister in charge of a grown-up attendant, that tall slim girl who leads the child by its hand, and lifts it to look over the parapet at the men singing in the meadow. Tourists are entranced by the lucky peep.

"Please can you tell me their names? I should like to know which was which."

And the guide recites their august names. The big boy is Lord Collingbourne; the elder daughter is the Lady Gladys Emily; the little boy is the Honorable John Seymour Charlton; the younger daughter is the Lady Cynthia Grace—"Yes, miss, there's a pencil, if you wish to write it down."

"And who was the young person? Was she the governess?"

"No, that was my lady herself."

"The Countess herself! How wonderful! so simple, so young!"

Yes, so happy.

Two other tourists, two London curates, straggling from their guide, have been shown things of interest about the chapel by a tall man in gaiters. A very intelligent person—who was he?—a sort of keeper or bailiff? "There he goes now—there, under the archway."

"Oh, that is my lord himself."

The parson tourists are amazed. "So unassuming, and so pleasant!"

Yes, so happy.

Perfectly happy—the richest nobleman in Yorkshire,—with no bad security—all solid wealth, made up of Time, Love, Peace.

He is hurrying now to his children and his wife—after being hindered, but not hurt, by buzzing flies. While he talks to his loved ones, he listens to the song of the men beneath the parapet. It is a pretty harvest music, rising and floating on the sun-warmed breeze; but the bailiff's ear catches false notes

in it. Something wrong with the song—a working chorus sung by men who are idle. What is it—what are you waiting for there? The hay is ready to carry—why aren't you carrying it?

We can't go on, my lord. No wagons. We are waiting for the wagons. Wagons all wanted up at Sackett Meads—but promised here,—ought to have been here two hours ago.

The bailiff, before he drinks his tea, must climb the tower, and look out from the platform to see if wagons are on their way.

"I'll go with you, father."

"I, too."

"And I."

"Daddy, stop. Take me, too."

"Go on, Seymour. I'll bring her with me."

From the winding stair they came out upon the battlemented platform, where he had stood with his young bride and surveyed the land for the first time.

The map that stretched out at his feet had changed since then. There were many more toy houses, hundreds more threads of water, stone bridges, and wooden sluices, now than then. The stream ran deeper, between higher banks; and the colors all over the map were bright and clean, with no ugly brown patches to mark bog or quag.

"Daddy, lift me up. I want to see the wagons, too."

So he stood for a minute, with his child in his arms, and smiled at the altered map. He could smile at the river triumphantly, taunt it, and defy it—"Have I conquered you, my silver snake?"—and the river could only writhe and slip away: it could not spoil the map.

"Yes, daddy, I see the wagons. Don't put me down."

As he stood, still holding the child, he felt happy and at rest; and this perhaps was the thought behind his smile:—"These fields I won, these barns I built, to these children I gave breath Thus and so far have I made something out of nothing. Thus have I fought the all-embracing dream, and clung to the semblance of reality. These are my poor works—in this my little time of light between the rising of the shadows and the shadows' fall."

THE END

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